

NUMBER 44

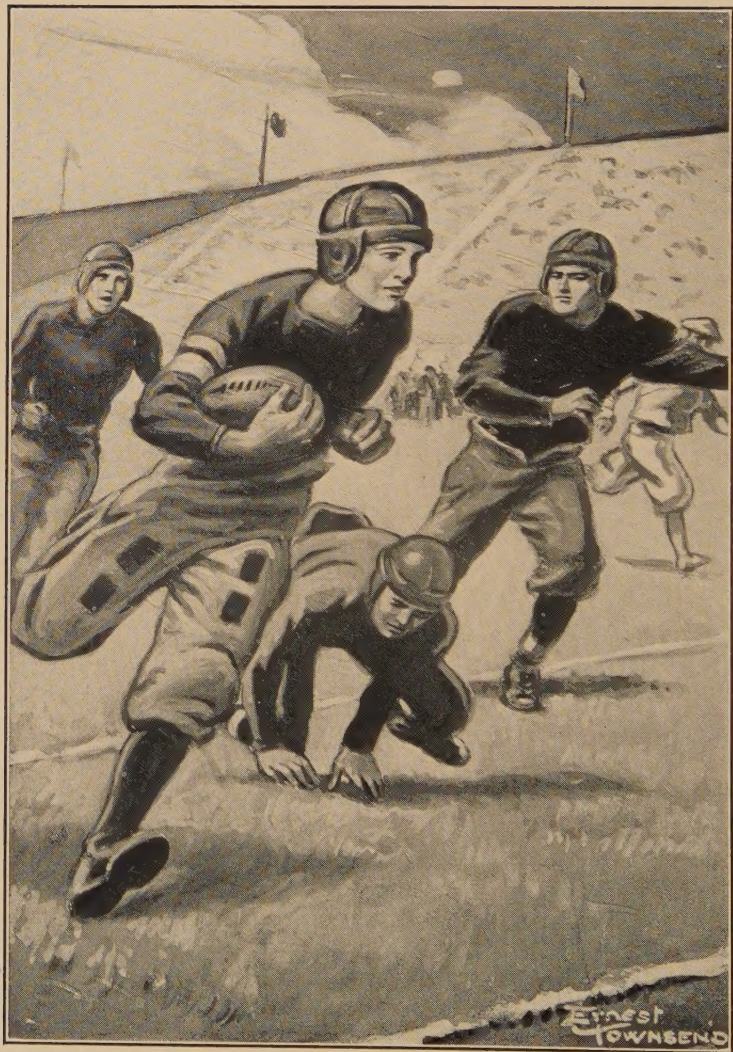


HAROLD M. SHERMAN





NUMBER 44



"LOOK AT HIM! HE'S REVERSED HIS FIELD!" SCREAMED
A THOUSAND THROATS.

Number 44.

Frontispiece (Page 34)

NUMBER 44

AND OTHER FOOTBALL STORIES

BY
HAROLD M. SHERMAN

AUTHOR OF
FLASHING STEEL
ONE MINUTE TO PLAY
BLOCK THAT KICK
HIT BY PITCHER
BASES FULL, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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MADE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To

BRYANT BAIN, JR.

Right End on Traverse City
High School Eleven, 1929. Chosen
on All-Northern Michigan Team.

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NUMBER 44

WITHIN a glass case, in the Hero Room of Ellsworth College, hung a faded and worn jersey with the numerals "44" fastened to its back. The jersey was wrinkled and mud-caked. There were tatters in the sleeves at the elbows, and a sizable tear in the seam of the left shoulder. A thoroughly disreputable looking garment, this! A garment so worthless as not to stand another laundering and yet so *priceless* that no one would permit it to be laundered! Physically, it represented a bit of the cast-off armor of Steve Branson, greatest football gladiator ever to stalk the field of battle for old Ellsworth. Historically, it reeked with memory scenes of the mighty Branson's unequalled exploits during the three years that he ran wild through all opposition. No, the jersey didn't amount to much. It was only a little less immortal than its wearer, that's all!

Number 44! Steve Branson had flashed this number from coast to coast. But wherever he

had gone, players and spectators alike had caught no more than fleeting glimpses of it. Because of this, when Branson's career had ended by his winning, in customary single-handed fashion, the big game of the year against Pittsfield, Ellsworth had triumphantly seized upon the famous jersey—advertising to the world in general and to opposing football teams in particular that—if anyone desired, for the first time, to get a good look at Number 44, that look was now available!

And *did* folks look? For the first few weeks the Hero Room at Ellsworth College was besieged by curious, as well as sincere mobs of admirers, who craved nothing more than the privilege of feasting eyes on what the *Daily Lambast* humorously termed, “Branson's dirty shirt.” So thrilling to think of a star's jersey being preserved for posterity!

Time, of course, brought a waning of hot enthusiasm, but a tradition persisted requiring all Freshmen, immediately following enrollment, to visit the Hero Room as a tribute to the memory of great deeds performed in the name of Ellsworth. Such visitation was a Senior idea, the wise elders laying much store by the impressive and inspirational atmosphere

which the Hero Room was supposed to radiate. Freshies needed the sobering influence of it. And besides, who could tell? Early environment meant much. A few might, in departing, leave behind them *similar* footprints!

The mighty Branson's jersey had hung in the glass case five years when "Bun" Ritter reached college. But Bun was one Freshie whose familiarity with it did not begin then. He had seen it from the first day it had appeared on Ellsworth field until that memorable occasion when it had been slipped over and off Branson's head for the last time. Bun's eyes had moistened with uncontrolled tears in that moment, for Steve, the tornado of the gridiron, had been his idol. And Bun, as team mascot, had come to know him personally. Why, he had even helped Steve pull the jersey off in the dressing room after the games when it had been wet and sticky with perspiration or, perhaps, soaked with rain and mud!

"Gee, Steve!" Bun had said, "if I could only play football like you!"

And the great Branson had answered with a grin, or a jab at Bun's ribs: "Keep trying, kid! You'll get there some day!"

That was when Bun had been going to grade

school, a youthful product of the college town, with eager eyes directed at the older fellows and their doings. Oh, why did he have to wait to grow up? He wanted to be right out there *now*, carrying the ball for old Ellsworth! Would he ever grow heavy enough? If he'd only stop getting tall and fill out a bit! These and other grave worries beset the youth.

In high school, Bun had gone out for full-back, his coveted position, but the coach had shaken his head. Too light! Might make a good end. And, so Bun had! Two years at that, while his body was taking on weight. Then, his Senior year at school, in the back-field! Hazelwood's triple threat man! He could kick; he could run; he could pass—all with equal facility. Great things ahead! Everyone said so. Ellsworth College looming up. One-time mascot might now become outstanding member of an Ellsworth eleven!

Bun made the Freshman team and, keeping pace with prophecy, attained star proportions—incidentally soaking up a world of valuable seasoning. The college enthused with anticipation at his performance. Ellsworth's football fortunes had slumped badly following Branson's departure. Another great player was

sorely needed. Someone who could again strike fear in the heart of Pittsfield! Why, since the human tornado's passing, the rival college had revengefully torn all Ellsworth elevens to shreds. This procedure must stop! Aroused alumni joined their protest with the student body, insisting that immediate steps be taken to raise Ellsworth from the doormat class. "We've been stepped on long enough!" raved one prominent graduate. "And if the price of deliverance is another Branson, let's find and develop him!"

Coach Allen, with a record of fifteen years in the service of Ellsworth, smiled considerately. He knew, better than all else, how impossible were the demands being made upon him. He knew that players of Steve Branson's caliber came to a coach rarely more than once in a life time—if *then*! Moreover, he knew that, beyond a certain point, such players could not be developed. They possessed a sort of genius which no coach could instill . . . a fire . . . a zeal . . . a fighting quality which carried them to dizzy heights in the plunging tide of battle. A coach needed only to build the entire offensive around stars of this magnitude and they could ordinarily be depended on to do the rest.

Branson had. Never once, in his three awe-inspiring years in Ellsworth's backfield, had he failed to rise to the occasion demanded. And now the clamor to develop another such as he! The coach looked off into space and snapped his fingers. "Just as if it was as easy as that!" he said.

Bun Ritter kept on trying. "Some day!" he kept telling himself. Every so often, for added inspiration, he wandered through the room which contained the glass case, which contained the jersey, which contained the famous Number 44, which excited memories that sent the blood racing.

"Gee, Steve!" Bun would say, "I've got a long ways to go yet!"

And out on the gridiron he would throw himself into scrimmage with a fervor born of intense desire. And Coach Allen, looking on, placed the former Ellsworth mascot in the second team backfield. By mid-season Bun was a varsity substitute. His first thrill came in the game against Maitland. Two minutes to play. Ellsworth leading, 7 to 6. A terrific Maitland bid for a touchdown had just ended on Ellsworth's five-yard line and the ball had gone over. Coach sending him in to *punt*!

Under these conditions, Bun Ritter—heart pounding but nerves steady—got off a fifty-yard kick which took the last semblance of hope from the enemy! Newspapers that night wondered why the coach hadn't used Bun sooner.

The substitute fullback's real chance came the following week. He was placed in the starting line-up. With Ellsworth rooters giving him a tremendous send-off, the fellow who nursed the ambition to play like the great Branson, got off several dazzling open-field runs. But over-anxiety caused him to balance his good work with two costly fumbles. The coach removed him in the second quarter.

It was Wednesday of the next week that the accident happened. Bun, out for an auto ride with three Ellsworth team-mates, was thrown through the windshield when the car collided, head-on, with another car driven by a speeding motorist. Occupants of both machines were badly shaken up but Bun was the only one seriously injured. He suffered a broken left collar bone, several bad cuts about the head and face, in addition to bad body bruises. Yet the wound which hurt Bun worst was the news from the doctor that he was through with football for the year.

Ellsworth sighed for the mighty Branson once more as it met up with the old rival—Pittsfield. The zest was taken from home hopes in the first five minutes of play when Pittsfield rushed the ball the length of the field twice for two touchdowns. The final score read: Pittsfield, 24; Ellsworth, 6.

And on the side lines a youth, with an arm in a sling and a bandaged head, followed the slaughter silently. It was dubious whether his presence in the game would have made sufficient difference. As he watched Pittsfield's play, Bun marveled at the team's uniform power. Of course, Pittsfield was a bigger college and had more material to choose from in the building of elevens, yet this alone did not account for her turning out of better than average teams, year after year. Even when the great Branson had brought about Pittsfield's setback three seasons hand-running, Pittsfield had not been disgraced. She had suffered the sting of defeat but she had fought grimly to the end. With Ellsworth it seemed that, lacking some great stimulus, the team was lifeless. Bun wondered if this was the natural reaction after an eleven had been known for some years as

a "one-man team." Whatever the reason, Ellsworth's plight was very, very sad.

The *Daily Lambast* in an article entitled, "A Glance into the None Too Rosy Future," lamented the athletic doldrums into which Ellsworth teams had fallen. Lack of genuine leadership was advanced as a possible cause. Need of a colorful field general was stressed. "Some individual with plenty of Pep, Push and Personality to keep the eleven on its toes," was the way the *Lambast* put it. "Let his football talent be secondary but his influence primary!" The *Lambast* then went on to bemoan the fate which had removed Bun Ritter, one of Coach Allen's most promising players, from play. "Ritter's great earnestness and fight put spine in the backfield. He came the nearest of this year's material to supplying that indefinable something so necessary to the personnel of a winning team!"

When Bun Ritter read this his eyes clouded mistily.

"Next year, Steve!" he said, resolutely, "I'll get there—next year!"

But next year brought a different Ritter. The difference was not immediately apparent.

In early season he had flashed some of the most spectacular playing seen on Ellsworth field in recent years. His work, however, lacked consistency. Coach Allen thought, at first, it was Bun's old over-anxiousness creeping out, and he was therefore lenient, giving it a chance to wear off. Visibly, the youth had not changed. He still exhibited the seriousness of purpose which had given a fighting quality to his work. Yet something was decidedly wrong. Perhaps he was taking himself too seriously! Acting on this hunch, Coach Allen did everything possible to develop in Bun a care-free attitude. No result. And then, one day, while still very much perplexed, the coach noticed something. Bun was getting under way fast but slowing up every time he was about to hit the line or, if in the open field, at just the instant he was to be tackled!

"Hmmm!" said Coach Allen, and spent a busy fifteen minutes scratching his chin.

The one discovery brought on another. Every time Bun was tackled he would endeavor to fall upon his right side! Now, why was this? Once discovered, the attempt was obvious. Bun would commence twisting his body to meet the impact before a tackle occurred!

"Let's see," studied the coach. "Which collar bone was it that he broke? . . ."

The answer to this question answered all other questions. Bun had broken his *left* collar bone. And now, either instinctively or consciously, he was favoring it. There was an evident dread of hard contact. Bun was not hitting the line head-on. He was bouncing off of it sidewise if he could not find an opening. When he skirted the ends he swept wider than necessary rather than cutting in and chancing a stiff tackle. His gains, consequently, were shorter; his efforts, needlessly spent. He also was not following his interference closely. Naturally fast on his feet, a clever runner and dodger, most of the gains that Bun made were due to his individual ability. And individual effort such as Bun was putting forth, meant only one thing—an attempt at self-protection. There'd be no more crashing through windshields with him; no more smashing of collar bones; no more bruising up against hard, unyielding objects! Coach Allen, now that the reason was clear, could analyze Bun's feelings and reactions minutely. He could tell to a nicety just what Bun would do under certain conditions. And being able to tell, the coach

groaned helplessly. He had too keen a recollection of other players in like predicament! Here was another likely bubble bursted! A potential football star defeated by an accident!

Bun knew, of course, that he was playing safe. But he didn't know that anyone else knew it. Furthermore, he had kidded himself into believing that it was not affecting his play. To him, there was no sense in openly courting new injury by taking the brunt of things on his weaker side. The collar bone had not knitted well and the doctor had felt called upon to break it over and re-set it. This ordeal, together with the words, "You'll have to take great care for a long time," had left its mark in memory. And Bun, ever since, had exercised exceeding caution.

Ellsworth rooters, watching Ritter hopefully, felt a vague sense of disappointment. He never quite seemed to come up to expectations, and yet his form seemed flawless to the eye. In kicking and passing his performance was exceptional. There was an explanation for this which few appreciated, in that these two phases of his ability were largely shielded of physical contact. But when it came to ball carrying, Ellsworth fans reluctantly observed that

“Ritter was not quite *there!*” Yet Bun, even with his gnawing weakness, was the best man Coach Allen had for fullback!

Mid-season brought the more important games. Thus far the team, despite all drawbacks, had shown greater collective power. Coach Allen was frankly surprised. On the basis of material alone, he felt that the present eleven did not represent more than ordinary. But it was the coach’s business to maintain a conservative attitude. And so, when Ellsworth defeated Chesterton, first of the stronger opponents, 19 to 0, the student body laughed when Coach Allen was quoted as saying: “I don’t understand it!”

The *Daily Lambast*, neglecting momentarily its harp of pessimism, came out with the heading, “Can We Believe Our Senses?” going on to say that Ellsworth actually had begun to exhibit evidence, in shoddy but no less unmistakable fashion, of *getting* somewhere this season. “A better spirit is developing,” asserted the college sheet, “and, though there is nothing flashy about our team’s play, we have no hesitancy in proclaiming this eleven as the most promising since the glorious days of old Steve Branson!”

The Monday night following, Coach Allen decided to take action with regard to Bun Ritter. From past experience the coach doubted that much could be done, but a time was fast approaching when Ritter's full power would be vitally needed. And there was a slight possibility that calling his attention to the failing would shock him out of it.

"Ritter," called the coach, when the former mascot had come in to the bench from practice at drop-kicking goals.

Bun, flushed with having booted seven successive goals from ranges of twenty on up to forty-five yards, came over expectantly.

"Yes, sir?"

Coach Allen motioned the fullback to be seated next him, on the end of the bench, so that they could talk and not be heard. Then, eying Ritter quietly, he placed a hand on the player's left shoulder.

"Do you suppose," he inquired, with pointed softness, "that a padded brace on this would help?"

"Why?" The question came involuntarily, almost as a gasp.

Coach Allen, watching closely, caught an instinctive flickering of the eyelids.

"To protect your shoulder, of course!" he replied with that same sharp softness.

Bun's face colored.

"Oh! . . . Oh, no, sir . . . thanks! The shoulder's all right!"

"That so? I thought it might be giving you trouble. Noticed you weren't using it any more than you could help."

"I . . . well . . . I . . ." faltered Bun

"And it's wrecking your play," followed up the coach, not raising his voice. "You're losing speed, punch and timing . . . I've watched you out there. You're pitiful, Ritter . . . pitiful as compared to what you might be!"

The fellow who had wanted to play football like Steve Branson, sat unanswering, staring at the ground. Unconsciously he raised his right hand and massaged the left shoulder. Then, as if realizing, he dropped his hand guiltily and stood up.

"I—I'm sorry, sir," said Bun, lips compressed, "I didn't know I was 'so rotten. I'll try to do better!"

With that he turned on his heel and made for the clubhouse, face burning.

Ellsworth's next game was away from home, a clash with Franklin. The contest proved a

battle from the opening minute but the greatest struggle taking place on the gridiron that afternoon was unobserved by all save Coach Allen. And when this struggle was concluded by the ending of the game, an individual named Ritter had lost, though his college had won. The Ellsworth's fullback's kicking had been his only redeeming feature. Time and again his punts had discouraged Franklin drives which had carried deep into Ellsworth territory . . . and Franklin had found itself confronted with the task of gaining the same yardage over again . . . a task which left the home team still trying at the last whistle and Ellsworth out in front, 13 to 7. For Ellsworth, the victory had been most fortunate as one touchdown had been scored on an intercepted forward pass, the other from a fumbled punt—both breaks coming in the first half, permitting the visiting college to play a strictly defensive game thereafter. But Ellsworth rooters, seeing in terms of victory only, went mad at the triumph. Wild predictions were made which time proved impossible of fulfillment. Apparently, in the light of later developments, Ellsworth had reached the crest of her season's play in the Franklin contest. Her colors were

dipped in defeat the following two Saturdays and joyous rooters became joyless. At length, only the combat with the arch enemy, Pittsfield, remained and, since Ellsworth—for all her ups and downs—had won half her so-called big games, the student body voted that the season would be declared a success if her eleven closed it by defeating her mightiest of foes.

The day before the final game, with interest running high, the *Daily Lambast* published a Special Football Number giving a résumé of the team's play, individually and collectively. Part of a column was devoted to Bun Ritter.

“Ritter's play this season has been a conundrum,” said the *Lambast*, “and can, at best, be described as spotty. Heralded last year as a player of great promise, he suffered injuries in an auto accident which may have slowed him up. Undoubtedly, with Ritter in the shape his last season's form indicated, Ellsworth's present slate would still be clean. And yet, with all our criticizing of Ritter, his presence in the backfield has been perhaps the most helpful cog in the machine! Bun is always in there trying . . . and the spirit he has shown, in the face of shortcomings, has somehow communicated itself to fellow team members. It is

therefore more regrettable than otherwise, the fact that Bun has not been able to play up to the best that was in him.”

The player in question did not need to read what had been written about him to know where he stood. The wonderment, to him, was that he had not been roasted alive. He felt sincerely that he deserved all condemnation which might be heaped upon him. There could no longer be any mistaking his difficulty and yet the college was withholding caustic comment. This was harder to bear than outright branding. It did not matter that he had tried, again and again, to throw himself into the game with abandon, to recover his old free and easy style, to overcome that instinctive flinching from hard physical contact. Yet the obviously genuine fight he was making to do just that, was exactly what Ellsworth was giving him credit for. To Bun, however, the one awful fact remained—a fact which had become more mountainous with the playing of each succeeding game—he had *failed!* . . .

As Coach Allen was passing down the corridor of the Main Building that evening, his attention was called to a light in the Hero Room. As the room was rarely open at night, his cu-

riosity was aroused. Perhaps some alumni, back for to-morrow's game, had secured permission to visit it that they might show some friends around. Whatever the reason, the thing was worth investigating.

Approaching the door of the Hero Room, the coach turned the knob softly and looked within. He was scarcely prepared for the sight which greeted him. A well-built youth was leaning, arm against a glass case, head against arm—sobbing! The youth was entirely unaware that another was near. Presently he straightened, knuckled the tears from his eyes, and gazed within the case at a bedraggled jersey which hung, limply unresponsive.

“I—I’m sorry, Steve,” the coach heard the youth murmur, apologetically, “but I just had to get it out of my system. It’s helped a lot, coming to you like this. Gee, if I’d just feel to-morrow like I feel now! You’ve got me all pepped up! Stick with me, Steve! I can’t let this thing beat me again! *I can’t!*”

Coach Allen waited to hear no more. He pulled the door shut as softly as he had opened it and continued down the corridor, clearing his throat several times to relieve a smarting sensation.

An unusual tenseness prevailed in the Ellsworth dressing room five minutes before game time. Outside a tremendous din raged, all but drowning the frantic blaring of college bands. The excitement without communicated itself to the high-strung nerves of the players within. Some nervously chewed finger nails, others picked at shoe laces, a few paced agitatedly up and down, still others sat—pensively silent—fists clenching and unclenching. And none could understand why the coach had sent them out on the field only to order them back to the clubhouse for the last few minutes before the game. Even Pittsfield had been led to wonder over this strange and unprecedented procedure. Once an eleven took the gridiron it was customary for it to remain thereon until play was called. What sort of strategy was this that Ellsworth was resorting to? The stands buzzed with speculative comment.

“Team!” said Coach Allen, entering hurriedly, “I’ve just received a very important wire from the coast . . . a wire from a fellow you all know—Steve Branson!”

The atmosphere became electric with interest.

“I’ve called you in here to read you this

wire in deference to the greatest football man old Ellsworth ever had . . .”

Coach Allen focused his eyes on the sheet of yellow paper as did the eyes of all in the room. He commenced reading in a calm, emotionless voice:

“ ‘Fight ’em, gang! Break their jinx with old Number 44. Give Bun Ritter my jersey. Sorry I can’t see game but I’ll sure be getting it over the radio . . . Steve.’ ”

As Coach Allen finished he reached behind him, bringing forth a faded and worn garment which he tossed unceremoniously to Steve’s former mascot.

“All out!” cried a voice at the door.

“Gee, Coach!” protested a surprised and overwhelmed youth, catching the jersey, “I—I can’t do this!”

“Sure you can! What’s so hard about that? Can’t you see what a *pleasant* reminder it’s going to be to Pittsfield?”

Players, shuffling toward the door, grinned. That’s right! They hadn’t thought of that! Real psychology in Steve’s idea!

“Go ahead, Bun!” urged Herb Edsel, quarterback.

"Yes, but I—I'm not fit to . . . you see . . ." Bun started to confess.

For answer, team-mates near him yanked his own jersey off, replacing it with the historic one. And Number 44 became flesh and blood again!

Coach Allen followed his squad from the clubhouse, shouting to make himself heard above the riot of sound.

"Go in there, men, and play the game as though you've got Steve Branson on the team!"

Then, grasping the arm of a white-lipped youth in a tattered jersey, he said: "Remember, Bun—Steve's going to be listening for old 44 in action. He's expecting big things of it. Don't fail him!"

Steve Branson's old number had not been used since his departure. Rumor had it that the number would never be used again. Accordingly, the unexpected sight of it caused many spectators to momentarily doubt their vision. But when those close to the field passed up the word that Bun Ritter was wearing Steve's actual jersey, a mighty gasp of surprise went the rounds. Impulsively, the Ellsworth stands arose and paid tribute to Num-

ber 44 with a terrific outburst of cheering. Ritter's wearing of the jersey was accepted as an exceedingly good omen. Those superstitiously inclined proclaimed the introduction of the number which had worked magic for the human tornado as a piece of master strategy. A thrill took hold of the throng, such a thrill as had possessed every crowd which had looked upon the mighty Steve Branson. All eyes were now glued fascinatedly upon Bun Ritter, suddenly become a knight through the wearing of a hero's armor. And a wave of sympathetic feeling went out at the thought of what he would have to live up to! The fellow was really in a most unenviable position! Doing with Number 44 as it had been done by in the past would call for play of the most remarkable character. If Ritter could even begin to hold up, under the circumstances, his work should be considered phenomenal. At least this was the opinion of the crowd.

Pittsfield rooters, good sports that they were, gave generous applause to Steve Branson's memory.

"But it'll take lots more than his jersey to trim us!" they confidently declared.

And the next instant the game was on!

Ellsworth kicked off. Pittsfield was down on their thirty-yard line after a seventeen-yard run-back. Wild excitement prevailed. Both teams were obviously keyed to a high fighting pitch. On the first play, Pittsfield hit the line for two yards. Second down around end brought no gain. Another smash at the line—yard and a half. Ellsworth holding frenziedly. Punt formation! A long, spiraling kick . . . the ball settling on Ellsworth's twenty-one-yard line with Number 44 under it!

The Ellsworth stands arose as one man. Steve Branson had run punts back for touchdowns. What would Number 44 do now?

“Come on! *Come on!*”

And Bun, tremblingly anxious to make good, dropped the ball! It bounced off to his left. He was after it in a flash with Pittsfield men bearing down upon him. Two of them dove for the rolling pigskin at the same time. But Bun, striking on his left shoulder, somehow slid beneath them and clutched the ball to his stomach. Then darkness descended.

In the stands a dead silence reigned while the referee, straddling the prostrate form of Number 44, sought to restore breath by the

old familiar method of lifting him up and down at the loins.

A water boy raced out from the side lines with a swishing water bucket and dashed a sloshing wave of water into the face of the player, now commencing to rouse.

Two Ellsworth team-mates, pulling Number 44's arms over their shoulders, walked the weak-kneed player about. Then they let him stand alone as the crowd gave him a cheer.

"Yea, Ritter! Yea, Yea, Yea!"

Herb Edsel, quarterback, was seen to go up and question the fullback, anxiously. And Number 44, with a hand holding his left shoulder, shook his head. He was staying in. The whistle! Ellsworth lining up on her nineteen-yard line. Right half around end. Four yards! Right half again. Two more! Yea! The ball goes to Number 44. A wide end run!

"Cut in! Cut in!"

No, he's running too wide. They're going to nab him! Look at him twist, his body! He's turned half around at the tackle and falls heavily on his right side . . . almost out of bounds! The linesmen are measuring. What do you know about that? A three-yard loss! Number 44's getting a great start!

"Take off that jersey!" roared the Pittsfield stands as the Ellsworth fullback was sent back to punt.

But there was nothing the matter with the kick which Number 44 got off. It carried sixty yards, struck near the side lines and bounced out so that Pittsfield had no chance to run it back!

"There's a kick that does Steve Branson proud!" raved an old alumnus, "Atta boy, Bun!"

Bringing the ball into play on their eighteen-yard line, Pittsfield started a battering ram advance. Employing straight football, the heavier eleven ate up ground slowly but surely. Ellsworth resisted desperately, yet was forced to yield. A sudden, well-timed switching to forward passes carried the pigskin to Ellsworth's ten-yard line. From there a return to line smashing took it over in three downs. Pittsfield rooters went mad. The march of their eleven had been beautiful to see, almost the length of the field! To rub it in, the Pittsfield quarterback added the extra point on a place kick.

Score—Pittsfield, 7; Ellsworth, 0.

"Tremendous power in that Pittsfield team,"

commented an Ellsworth fan. "I can see right now we're not going to get far through the line to-day. And we're going to have one sweet time holding their offense!"

This Ellsworth fan was a prophet. Twice, in the first quarter, the home team fought the ball down to Pittsfield's thirty-yard line, only to be stopped dead. Twice also, the enemy penetrated far into Ellsworth territory before relinquishing the ball, and twice Number 44 had brought cheers with excellently placed punts. On the defense Bun was proving a tower of strength.

"You're booting great to-day," complimented Herb Edsel. "No more trying for touchdowns! If we get anywhere near Pittsfield's goal again I'm going to have you sharpshoot a drop kick over their bar!"

Bun nodded, grimly. There was a biting pain in his left shoulder. He no longer had to fear hurting it. The hurt was *there*. But the throb only increased his mental torture. What if he should hurt it worse? A growing despair welled up within him. He was bringing disgrace on Number 44 . . . and he couldn't help himself! What must Steve Branson be thinking? His Number 44 had shown up miserably

thus far. The biggest gain credited to it had been a paltry two yards! And three times it had been thrown for a loss! Pittsfield was taking particular delight in pouncing on Number 44 and crushing it to earth, as though the figure inside the jersey represented Steve Branson in effigy!

Bun knew the only reason Coach Allen was keeping him in the game was for his kicking. And he was glad for that. He didn't want to quit. He'd fought this thing all season. He intended to keep on fighting it. He wasn't afraid of ridicule. He *deserved* it. But *now* was the time to get a hold on himself. Now, when it seemed harder than ever! Now, when Ellsworth needed his services most! Now, when Steve Branson, the fellow he had always wanted to play like . . .

In the second quarter, Number 44 drop-kicked two field goals, one from the twenty-eight-yard mark, the other from the thirty-two-yard stripe, both coming on the last down after Ellsworth had abandoned hope of penetrating farther toward the Pittsfield goal. Bun's confidence in his kicking was supreme. His team-mates were giving him great support,

holding furiously to enable him to get his kicks away unhurried. And he was rewarding them by marvelously accurate booting, hoping and praying that his kicking might somehow compensate for his sad showing otherwise.

Score at the end of the first half: Pittsfield, 7; Ellsworth, 6!

Not so much kidding, on Pittsfield's part now, of the fellow in the historic jersey. He was, one might say, "single-footedly" keeping his team in the running. If Ellsworth couldn't count by the touchdown method, this firing away at field goals had a chance of bringing victory. Pittsfield would have to get busy. The game wasn't in the bag yet by any means! Disconcerting, too, when one figured the great amount of yardage Pittsfield had gained as compared to Ellsworth . . . then to realize there was but one point's difference in the score!

Ellsworth kicked off to start the second half and Pittsfield went into action, determined to get a safe lead and hold it. Everything worked well until the forty-yard line was reached. Then a forward pass whizzed straight into the arms of Number 44. The interceptor was

downed almost in his tracks but it was Ellsworth's ball on Pittsfield's forty-five-yard line and what looked to be the golden opportunity of the game was at hand!

"A touchdown, gang!" pleaded quarterback Edsel.

To Ellsworth's everlasting credit, it can be said that the eleven put forth a terrific effort to produce. And to Pittsfield's everlasting credit, it may be said that they were equal to the onslaught. Ellsworth brought up on the eighteen-yard line with a last down and seven yards to go. Should a forward pass be chanced or should Ellsworth make a bid for three more points through the toe of Bun Ritter? Another field goal would put them in the lead! The team went into a huddle, talked it over, and Edsel shouted the decision in Number 44's ear: "You're elected!"

Bun's third field goal in three tries flashed over the bar from the twenty-five-yard line! And Ellsworth, mad with joy, paid him tumultuous tribute. Old heads declared they were witnessing the greatest exhibition of kicking ever seen on Ellsworth field. But the fellow in the tattered jersey bearing the famous numerals was thinking of how he had failed to come

through. He had failed, during Ellsworth's attempt at a touchdown, to come through with gains which would have given the eleven her yards. And because of this the cheers sounded like mockery. As for the field goal, Bun considered that he had only made up three points of what should have been seven!

"Come on, fellows!" cried Quarterback Edsel as the teams lined up to resume play. "Bun's put us out in front. Let's *stay* there!"

Ellsworth, sensing that this would probably be her only hope for victory, put up a great fight in defense of her slender two points. Pittsfield hammered to within fifteen yards, then lost a first down by inches and Ellsworth immediately gave the ball to Number 44 who punted. The timer's whistle screeched. Third quarter over!

As the elevens changed ends of the field with Ellsworth still ahead, 9 to 7, intense excitement prevailed. Ritter's name was on every tongue tip. If Pittsfield should be held scoreless to the finish, the new wearer of an old and famous jersey would be the latest hero of the hour. Folks would cheerfully forget his weak offensive work in the light of his signal kicking achievement. Newspapers would link his name

with the Steve Bransons of the past. And a glorious story would be told of how . . .

But things seldom happen for the sake of stories. Unleashing another attack from mid-field, Pittsfield once more drove toward the Ellsworth goal . . . a relentless driving which wore severely against a tiring Ellsworth line. Quarterback Edsel's exhortations to "Hold!" were lost now upon men who had given their all in the savage hope that victory might perch on Ellsworth's banner. But eleven jerseys emblazoned with the Number 44 could not have restrained this last desperate assault. Pittsfield would not be denied. Pittsfield was going over if it had to smash the opposing line from end to end . . . and this is just about what it had to do. But, with three minutes remaining of the last quarter, the touchdown Ellsworth had sought so heroically to prevent, occurred. Heartbroken, though fighting to the last, the home team saw the extra point after touchdown added on a place kick and Pittsfield's name go ahead of Ellsworth's on the scoreboard.

Pittsfield, 14; Ellsworth, 9.

"All over but the shouting," said a spectator, limply. "But, oh—*what* a game!"

It was Pittsfield's kick-off. A dusk was settling over the gridiron but the Pittsfield stands were blazing with light-hearted rooters. Here was a victory worth raving about! Ellsworth had proven the mightiest of foes. This game would go down in the books as one of the fiercest ever waged.

"It's all my fault!" sobbed an Ellsworth player to himself. "I've fallen down again, Steve! I—I guess I can't beat this thing after all! I don't know what's the matter with me! I—I must be *yellow!* . . ."

The kick-off!

With a start, Number 44 saw that the ball was coming to him!

"Follow me!" shrieked Quarterback Edsel, crossing over to form interference.

"Yea, Ritter!" yelled the Ellsworth crowd in one last frenzy of hope.

And then a strange thing happened. As the fellow with the tattered jersey caught the ball and fell in behind his interference, an inner voice commenced to shrill above the din: "Here's your chance! Your chance! Your chance! *One more chance!* Your chance! Your chance! . . ."

"My chance!" Bun repeated, "I'm taking it, Steve! I'm taking it!"

The white marks churned under his feet. Danger ahead! Quarterback Edsel down, blocking off a sure tackle! Number 44, now fully come to life, veered to the right. Pop-eyed Pittsfield tacklers veered also . . . then veered again as the onrushing tornado veered once more!

"Look at him! He's reversed his field!" screamed a thousand throats.

Ten yards from the Pittsfield goal, Bun was forced close to the side lines. He would either have to meet his tackler head-on or step outside. Bun turned in, shoving out his hand to straight arm. But the tackler, hurtling at him, knocked his arm upward and struck Number 44 so heavily that both tackler and tackled left the ground. In falling, Bun's left shoulder took the brunt of the impact.

Pittsfield, paralyzed with fear that Number 44's Branson-like run would culminate in a touchdown, broke into riotous cheering. Less than a minute of play remained and Ellsworth was still ten yards from the goal! *Ten yards!* By so much had Bun lost his chance!

"Me! *me!* Give the ball to *me!*" he de-

manded of Quarterback Edsel, as Ellsworth lined up speedily. "If that had been Steve he'd have made it! Give the ball to . . ."

Edsel jammed the ball hard against Bun's stomach as he came tearing through. The fellow with the tattered jersey hit the line with his left shoulder forward, winced with pain, but kept going.

"Second down, five to go!" bawled the referee.

Timers consulted their watches. All was delirium. Pittsfield—clawing, distracted Pittsfield—had eyes only for a flaming spirited figure wearing a jersey now considerably more tattered than it had been before. There was time for but one more play!

Bun staggered back into position, teammates slapping him crazedly on the back. He held out his arms for the ball. Tears were streaking down his face though he was unconscious of it.

"Gee, Steve, you're mighty good to me! You're giving me *lots* of chances!"

The left arm hung lamely at Number 44's side. He hugged it against the ball as he practically caught the pigskin one-handed. A frenzied Ellsworth line, gone mad with the inspira-

tion of the moment, opened up a hole. Through this a bullet-like streak shot and disappeared beneath a mass of struggling forms. Then the whistle!

Seconds of heart-palpitating intensity as the referee dug to the bottom of the heap. Finally the Ellsworth stands gone maniacal with joy.

"It's over! It's over!"

And in a little town on the western coast an older young man of athletic build went "nuts" before his radio.

"I told the kid he'd get there some day!" he raved. "Say, maybe that wasn't a slick one Coach Allen pulled to bring him out! I'd never have thought that my little wire and the use of that jersey would . . ."

The point after touchdown wasn't needed for Ellsworth had won without, 15 to 14, so no one felt badly a moment later, when Bun Ritter missed kicking it.

The next instant the field was alive with milling spectators, all fighting to lay hands on a deserving successor to Steve Branson!

And how did the fellow who had finally played as he had wanted to play, take this acclaim? He had a painfully wrenched shoulder which could stand attention but he wasn't giv-

ing a thought to it. As he was lifted triumphantly overhead and borne off, he looked down at a jersey, now twice historic, and cried, remorsefully: "Look . . . Look what *I* did! What'll Steve say to this? I tore the sleeve off!"

OZZIE'S FOUR LETTERS

"ALL right, Ozzie! Go in for Chuck!"

It was late in the final quarter of what had been a furiously contested game between the elevens of Midland and O'Dell and now, Chuck Parker, Midland quarterback, was being taken out with an injured knee.

Ozzie Gray, substitute quarter, though hearing Coach Adams' voice, sat staring out at the field, unbelievably. He had waited all year for his chance and had all but given up hope that the chance would arrive.

"Snap it up, Ozzie! What's biting you?"

"M-me, sir?" Eyes widening, Ozzie jumped to his feet and jerked off his sweater. The Midland High stands, seeing him, gave a great, booming cheer.

"Yea, Gray! Yea! Yea! Yea!"

Dream-like, the substitute quarter found himself running out onto the field . . . entering the biggest game of the year and at the most crucial of moments! Four minutes to play,

second down with the ball in Midland's possession on O'Dell's eighteen-yard line, and Midland trailing O'Dell, six points to seven. A field goal or touchdown vitally needed to win!

Chuck, arms about the shoulders of two fellow team-mates, painfully dragging one leg, paused on his way off the field, to shout to the passing Ozzie.

"Give 'em the works, Ozz! We've got 'em on the run now. Right over for a touchdown!"

Ozzie nodded, his mind filled with a maze of formations and crazily tumbling signals. Let's see . . . ball on the eighteen-yard line, second down . . . the *works!* . . . Chuck meant a trick play . . . one of the secret formations they'd been drilled in night after night in anticipation of just such a situation as this.

Pink Newton, fullback; Art Hill, left half; and Stub Evans, right half, Midland veterans, looking grim and worn, greeted the substitute quarter as he reported to the referee.

"Heads together!" called Pink, and the four went into a conference.

"Touchdown, Midland!" roared the stands in a frenzy of entreaty.

"Hold 'em, O'Dell! Hold 'em!" begged the visitors.

"Right side of their line's weak," shouted Pink in Ozzie's ear. "Good time to spring that reverse play . . . fake run around left end and a drive through right tackle."

"I'll open the hole," promised Bill Nelson, linesman.

"Good!" decided Ozzie, glad of advice in his time of trial. "That's the play, then! *Signals! . . .*"

The referee's whistle screeched, the ball snapped back, Right Half Evans took the pig-skin on a quick pass from the substitute quarter, spanked it against the stomach of Art Hill as the left half cut past in the opposite direction. The O'Dell line, shifting toward the left, was thrown off balance and Bill Nelson, true to promise, tore an opening in the line by plowing through between O'Dell's right guard and tackle, smashing them both out of play. The carefully drilled formation called for the quarterback's going through as interference for the man with the ball but Ozzie, in the mad confusion of the moment, somehow lost his bearings. Good night! What was he supposed to do now? He turned about in a

dazed circle, then glimpsed Hill almost upon him. Oh, yes—interference! Ozzie wheeled with the charging Hill at his back. But he was slow getting under way and succeeded only in blocking his own man. Worse luck, Hill collided with him in trying to push Ozzie out of the way and both of them fell through the now rapidly closing gap in the O'Dell line. In an instant it seemed that they were buried beneath a pounding ton of human forms.

The referee, diving into the mass of players, located the ball.

“Third down, seven yards to go!” he announced, after a consulting glance at the linesmen.

“What’s the matter with you, Ozzie?” blazed Hill as soon as he could regain his feet. “You gummed that play right! I had a clear shot ahead!”

The substitute quarterback’s face flushed. A disturbed murmur came to him from the stands. Every second was precious. He must select his next play quickly . . . and it must be the *right* play. It must atone, somehow, for his exhibition of thick-headedness.

“Signals!” called Ozzie, and gave the numbers for the reverse of the formation he had

fizzled. In practice, Coach Adams had shown that a feint at the line following the first play and then a swinging out around the end, was good for yards . . . this variation of the first formation proving just deceptive enough to fool the opposition.

With Hill on the receiving end of the play again, the Midland left half brought the stands to their feet by altering his direction and, accompanied by the substitute quarterback as interference, started wide around O'Dell's right end.

"There he goes!" cried an excited voice. "Touchdown!"

But O'Dell, defending desperately in the face of what had been a determined, battering march down the field from Midland's own thirty-yard line, broke through in a frantic effort to down the man with the ball.

A couple of straight arms and clever dodging enabled Hill to evade a number of would-be tacklers, though he found himself to be running parallel to others of the enemy who were attempting to head him off as he sought to go around them.

"Cut in!" beseeched Midland as it was seen that Hill was being forced dangerously close

to the side lines without being able to make much progress.

"Get that guy!" he shouted to the substitute quarter as a threatening form loomed up in front.

Ozzie got him, there was no question of that. He blocked his man off beautifully but put himself out of play in so doing, leaving Hill to continue on his own. As Hill emerged into the open a mad cheer went up . . . a cheer, however, which was short-lived, for Hill, in trying to avoid running out of bounds, was tackled and thrown after a gain of only four yards.

"Fourth down, three to go!" cried the referee.

And the Midland stands groaned. On three previous occasions, Midland had marched well down into O'Dell territory only to have the rival school brace and hold. Her six points had resulted through a fortunate break in the game, occurring early in the first quarter, when a poor pass-back from center had enabled Midland to block and recover a punt so near the O'Dell goal line that three line plunges had taken the ball across.

"We'll never make it," predicted a Midland rooter, gloomily. "Not the way O'Dell's holding and the way Ozzie's picking plays! . . . Look where we are, over against the side line, and last down!"

The substitute quarter, in blocking the tackler trying to reach Hill, had been hit hard. Fellow players jerked him to his feet, dazed and groggy. Ozzie staggered back into position, glassy-eyed.

"Signals! . . ." he shouted. "Signals! . . ."

"Try a pass!" counseled Pink Newton. "It's our only chance!"

"What down is this?" asked the bewildered quarterback, looking around.

But his backfield men, crouching, swaying on their feet, could not hear above the roar of sound.

"Play ball!" yelled the referee.

Ozzie's senses commenced to clear. He must call a play at once else his team would be penalized five yards for stalling and this would be fatal. But—his head! Things seemed a bit thick! Here they were, a step from the side lines and what down? Must be third down! That's right—*third* down! And O'Dell was

holding like mad. Hardly a chance to make it through the line . . . a pass was too risky . . . a field goal? Only two points needed to beat O'Dell and a goal from the field would total three. But they were off too far to the side . . . the cross bar of the goal posts was at too bad an angle. Ah! The thing to do was to carry the ball outside so that it would be brought out by the referee and put in position for Pink Newton to try a field goal on the last down!

"Signals!" called Ozzie. "Seventeen, twenty-three, twenty-nine . . ."

"Signals over!" shrieked the backfield in amazed chorus.

But it was too late, the ball had been snapped back, and the substitute quarter, taking a side step, moved out of bounds as the two lines crashed.

For a moment the Midland stands sat in shocked silence, then—as the referee waved the ball over to O'Dell—pacing out from the side line with the substitute quarterback running along beside him, protesting frantically, a great heart-rending howl went up. Fellow team-mates joined in the howl, gathering round Ozzie with explosive gestures.

"Well, of all the boneheaded boneheads!" raved Pink Newton. "What you think you were doing?"

"But there's a mix-up somewhere," insisted Ozzie, tearfully. "We've got another down, Pink. We're being cheated out of a down. And you're going to kick a field goal. See where the ball is . . . swell position!"

"Yeah, only we haven't got the ball any more!" blazed Pink. "And there's about ten seconds to play. Boy, you're never going to live *this* down!"

"Take him out!" came the booming voice of an unkind spectator. "Oh, what a piece of cheese!"

"New ruling—five downs this year!" razzed another. "Funny the referee doesn't know about it."

The O'Dell stands, which had sat in uneasy and fearsome silence, during Midland's last bid for a score, now burst forth with a frenzy of joyous sound.

"It won't be long now!" they sung. "Oh, it won't be long now!"

And it wasn't. The tired O'Dell team lined up, punt formation, and their center made sure of his pass-back this time so that the kicker

could get his punt away without interference. While the booted ball was in the air, the timers' whistles blew and the students in charge of the scoreboard scrambled down, leaving the figures, O'Dell, 7; Midland, 6.

Instantly after the game a disgruntled mass of fans swarmed about the team members, curious to determine the cause of the substitute quarter's mental lapse.

"He can't count above three," explained a student. "That's the answer. You'll have to admit, though, if it *had* been the third down, his little play would have been a nice bit of strategy!"

"Sure!" admitted another. "And if Napoleon hadn't had his Waterloo he might never have been defeated! Let's have a little cranberry sauce, please!"

"Hey, Ozzie!" called a voice, "what was the matter—asleep?"

The substitute quarter, shaking his head and sobbing unashamedly, gave no answer. Fellow team-mates, glum with disappointment, formed a protecting wall about him.

"Step aside! Let him through!" ordered Art Hill, elbowing a lane.

"Cut that stuff!" cried Pink, resenting the

taunts. "It's all over now. How many of you grandstand quarterbacks could have done any better?"

"'Ray!" came a half-hearted response.

"What do you say, fellows?" proposed a wit in a shrill voice which carried out over the crowd. "I think Ozzie ought to be given his letter for this. . . ."

"By O'Dell!" broke in a second wiseacre.

"No, no!" insisted the first wit. "In fact his feat was so extraordinary, I propose he be made a four-letter man!"

"And what are the letters?" demanded the second wiseacre, not to be outdone.

"The letters are," shrilled the first wit. "Get this—everybody—we're about to award Ozzie Gray four letters for his performance in one game."

"Aw, dry up!"

"Pipe down, you!"

"Four letters!" persisted the wit.
"*D-u-m-b!*"

A titter of laughter went through the crowd. Kind of funny at that. Still, it was very bad taste . . . a cowardly sort of taunt.

"Let me at that bird!" raged Pink Newton, pushing through in the direction of the voice.

The players were near the Midland bench now and Chuck Parker, his leg bandaged, was on his feet, limping out to add his indignant protest.

“Who is he? He needs a good punch in the nose!”

But the perpetrator of the near riot was nowhere to be found, having accomplished a speedy fade-out at the first indication of possible violence. The damage, however, had been done.

“Four-letter man,” a student remarked, grinning. “*D-u-m-b!* That’s rich!”

And the designation spread, the feeling of keen disappointment over Midland’s defeat giving way to one of amused tolerance at the bunglesome direction of the substitute quarterback.

“Oh, well, what could you expect?” said a fan, resignedly. “Ozzie’s first big game. He’ll do better next time.”

“Only because he couldn’t do worse,” replied one, more unyielding.

In the locker room, team-mates, though inclined to agree as to Ozzie’s dumbness, tried their best to console the greatly chagrined substitute quarter.

"Don't you mind what those bozos in the crowd said, Ozzie," soothed Church, putting his arm about his understudy's shoulders. "You did the best you could, old man. That's all anybody can do. You just had the breaks against you."

"No," insisted Ozzie, "I deserve the pan-ning, and you guys know it. If I hadn't gotten in Art's way he might have gone through for a touchdown. . . ."

"Yeah . . . and I might not," responded the veteran left half. "You can't prove anything by 'ifs,' so the best thing to do is forget it. We'll get O'Dell next year!"

Next year! How lightly Art had said this, as though the losing to Midland's bitterest rival hadn't meant so much after all. As though all the hard weeks of pointing for this biggest contest of the year could be dismissed by a snapping of the fingers! No, he—Ozzie—knew what was in their hearts. He knew how each had hoped to do his bit toward ending O'Dell's reign of supremacy—a reign which had existed now for four unbroken seasons. The fellows wouldn't have minded if they had failed of their objective through no tactical error or blunder . . . if they had gone down

fighting to the last . . . their best plays repulsed in the shadow of O'Dell's goal posts. But to have been thrown off their stride, their last desperate offensive brought to naught through the stupid work of their quarterback . . . this was the thing that hurt. And yet, after their first instinctive outburst, they were curbing their feelings to save his! This was Midland spirit in the highest . . . a sort of spirit which only increased Ozzie's sense of unworthiness.

"I don't know how I ever got balled up on the downs," he tried to explain. "Seems to me I remember bumping somebody and then . . . everything kind of hazy . . . but I'm not trying to alibi myself, fellows. I—I was terrible!"

The four-letter stigma. It stuck to Ozzie Gray even after the football season had faded into days of basketball activity and popped out in a baseball game, when Ozzie, playing second base, threw home to catch a runner with two out, the logical play having been to first. The runner slid and was safe and the batter, who should have been retired, reached first safely, of course.

“Living up to his four letters,” chirped a rooter. “He’s a sweet player except in a pinch and then, for some unknown reason, he’s just naturally *D-u-m-b!*”

And so it began to seem. Ozzie himself couldn’t explain it. He tried to analyze himself, to determine why it was that, confronted with a tight situation, his mind somehow refused to grasp it all . . . and caused him to make moves which placed his team in jeopardy.

“I knew there were two out,” he confessed, afterwards. “But when I saw that runner shooting for home, I just couldn’t think of anything else but pegging to get him.”

A repetition of such experiences, however, caused Coach Adams to be more and more wary of dependence upon Ozzie in emergencies. The fellow came to be recognized as a conundrum. No one could prophesy what he would do next. At times, when little hung upon the result, he performed the most brilliant of plays. Take, for instance, his triple play unassisted, when he made a leaping catch of a line drive, raced to second and tagged it for a double out, and then chased the runner dashing toward second back down the base path, tagging him out ten feet from the first base sack. Hard to

find fault with his execution of this play, all figured out with lightning swiftness. It was such work as this which kept him on the team in the hopes that he had at last beaten his peculiar jinx. But the hopes always eventually proved groundless.

Came the football season again and Ozzie Gray, "Midland's only four-letter man," doggedly putting in his appearance as a candidate for the eleven.

"He's got a lot of nerve to be turning out after what happened last season," remarked an observer. "If I was that bird, I'd have called it quits long ago."

"Leave it to him," said another, unsympathetically. "He's just *dumb* enough to hang around and make things tough for the rest of the gang as long as the coach will have anything to do with him. If Coach Adams wants us to beat O'Dell this year, he ought to kick Ozzie off the squad. That guy's a hoodoo!"

Midland High's prospects for a crack eleven were more than good by reason of the fact that the entire backfield was intact from last season . . . a veteran outfit. There were four vacancies to be filled in the line due to graduation but the team, on paper, gave evidence of

developing into one of Midland's strongest. This evidence was supported in action with the playing of the opening game when Midland rolled up a 53 to 0 score against Carhart. A feature of this game was Ozzie Gray's relieving of Chuck Parker in the second half after Chuck had suffered a minor recurrence of his knee injury. Ozzie's handling of the team had been peppy and practically flawless, punctuated by two dazzling broken-field runs of his own, one of thirty and the other of forty-five yards, both culminating in touchdowns.

"Very pretty," admitted a spectator. "Only it doesn't mean anything."

And this remark quite generally represented the opinions of all. Midland fans had refused to become excited over anything that Ozzie might do, for past experience had taught them that he was more than apt to undo it the next minute, if not, the next game.

In mid-season, with Chuck again on the side lines nursing what he had now come to call "his trick knee," the wiseacres were once more given the opportunity of bestowing the four-letter honor upon the substitute quarterback. Midland was leading Oakville at the start of the fourth quarter by 13 to 12, having encoun-

tered unexpected opposition. The home team, however, had put on a furious drive which carried them to a first down on Oakville's two-yard line and prospects of putting the game on ice. Oakville's resistance had noticeably weakened, especially the left side of the line through which Midland had pounded for substantial gains. But now, with the elevens crouching almost on the goal line, the substitute quarterback directed four straight plays against the right side of Oakville's line, all of which were repulsed, Midland losing seven yards in the process, and the ball going over. Oakville immediately punted out of danger and, later in the quarter, put on a drive which came dangerously near to scoring on Midland, the whistle saving Ozzie's team from possible defeat.

"We ought to have scored at least two more touchdowns," figured a statistician. "And it's Ozzie's fault that we didn't. Honestly, I'm going to get heart failure if they play that guy much longer!"

"Well, he's evidently the best man Coach Adams has got outside of Chuck," deduced a veteran fan, "Or he wouldn't be in there. Which, I'll admit, isn't saying much!"

In the locker room following the game, teammates regarded one another soberly. They had nursed Ozzie along, shown him every consideration and sympathy, but there was a limit to everything. Regardless of how well Ozzie might mean, his unaccountable and consistent dumbness at times when scoring depended upon the proper strategy and choice of plays, was a weakness which was, sooner or later, to have them floundering in the mire of defeat.

"And we've got a good chance of going through the season unbeaten," declared Pink. "What do you think, guys—don't you figure we ought to say something to the coach?"

"Wait," counseled Chuck. "I'll have a talk with Ozzie first. See if I can't set him right."

The veteran quarterback hobbled over to the bench on which his understudy was sitting.

"Say, Ozzie," he greeted, in a low voice, as team-mates looked on with cautious glances. "I didn't quite get your psychology to-day. What was the idea of sending those four plays against the right side of Oakville's line when Oakville's left side was all shot? Don't you know the plan of battle always calls for your sending the attack against the weakest spot?"

"Yes," admitted Ozzie, lamely. "But I figured that that's just where I'd outguess 'em . . . that they'd be expecting an attack there and I'd catch 'em off guard with a smash at their strong side."

"Well, you only lost seven yards in four downs by it," reminded Chuck, bitingly.

"I still think it was good football," insisted Ozzie, with the courage of his conviction.

"Yes—for the opposing team!" was Chuck's jolting rejoinder. "Listen, Ozzie, that's just darn poor judgment. A couple smashes might have been all right but there's no excuse for your getting frozen to one idea when you saw it wasn't getting you anywhere."

"But don't you see?" pointed out Ozzie. "That every time I repeated the play there was just that much more chance of it working, for Oakville should have figured I'd surely be springing something else?"

Chuck groaned.

"Honest, Ozzie, your mental processes are beyond me. Personally, I can't see how you figured that way at all. It just looks to me like you got paralyzed and couldn't think of anything else but this one play. I hate to say it,

Ozzie—but those four letters that were handed you—they sure do fit—you're positively *D-u-m-b!*”

The veteran quarterback expected a fighting reaction to this. Instead, the fellow who had subbed for him the past two seasons, bowed his head and traced uneven circles on the cement floor with the toe of his shoe.

“I know it,” he owned up. “I’ve tried to break myself. But ever since that first big fizzle, when I get in a tight place I commence to think, ‘What am I going to do now?’ . . . and my thoughts all seem to run together . . . and I just reach out and begin doing something, whether it’s right or wrong.”

“Good grief!” exclaimed Chuck. “That’s bad—very bad. And here I am, apt to be laid up any time with this crazy knee of mine. I’ll tell you what, Ozzie . . . there’s one way out and you’d better take it for the sake of the team. Don’t you let yourself go off half-cocked again. Let the boys help you. They’re all vets, Pink and Art and Stub . . . they know their stuff . . . and they’ll be glad to tip you off as to the right play. Then all you’ll have to do will be to follow through.”

The substitute quarterback looked his discouragement.

"I—I've thought of that," he said. "But that isn't helping *me* . . . and I . . . I want to beat this thing! That's the only reason I've been sticking!"

The veteran quarterback limped about in an agitated circle.

"But great jumping jiminy, Ozzie!" Chuck exploded, "you can't go on making the team pay for your . . . er . . . dumbness! The gang has stood for plenty already . . . and they're still for you . . . but you've got 'em up in the air . . . they've reached the place where they can't put up with your directing any longer. They haven't any kick with your playing except when we're in the hole. But then, it seems to me, the least you could do would be to let them run the team for you. You wouldn't want to put us in a jam like you did last year, would you?"

The substitute quarterback shook his head, grimly.

"Not much danger of that," he assured, "Coach won't give me a chance. But I'm not so dumb that I don't get your point, Chuck.

You tell the gang that, if I'm sent in again, they can count on me following their lead!"

And so it was that the team-mates of the four-letter man solved a problem which was on the way to becoming all but demoralizing.

It was Coach Adams' quiet deduction that Ozzie Gray, after flopping so miserably in his first big game, had built up a mental hazard which, by his very fear of repeating the experience, was preventing him from thinking clearly under stress. And the coach, rather than emphasize the cause by suggesting it, had sought to give Ozzie a hold on himself by placing him under fire. The condition, however, seemed to grow more aggravated, rather than relieved. And finally, with fans clamoring against the risk of using the substitute quarter except in cases of absolute necessity, Coach Adams had felt impelled to keep Ozzie on the bench, sending him into a game only when he regarded it as clinched, at which times Ozzie always made a good showing.

"There goes Ozzie in," the rooters became accustomed to exclaiming. "Guess Coach Adams considers the game won!"

And the substitute quarter would be given

a generous cheer since it was reasonably certain that his presence in the line-up couldn't cost Midland any serious damage.

The game with O'Dell, this season, was to be played on O'Dell's field. And this gave to O'Dell a mythical if not actual advantage. Tradition had it that teams usually gave a better account of themselves amid the familiar surroundings of their home fields with a preponderance of home folks to cheer them on to victory. And this year, according to those who had seen both elevens in action, it was predicted that Midland, despite her undefeated veteran aggregation, would need all she possessed in moral support as well as power to achieve victory against a mighty O'Dell.

"We won't need any bonehead plays to win for us this season," declared an O'Dell rooter, harking back to the now famous Ozzie Gray episode. "If we don't beat Midland by at least two touchdowns, I'll go through the winter bareheaded!" Which statement, if nothing more, served to indicate the confidence existing in the O'Dell camp.

The Midland squad, brought to O'Dell the night before the game—an eager, fighting bunch

of warriors—sensed the cocksure attitude of their foe. Small wonder after the series of straight triumphs which O'Dell had realized.

“We'd be sitting easy, too!” pointed out Pink, “If we were wearing O'Dell's shoes. But, fellows, I'd rather be a little worried and uncertain and determined than too dead sure. Besides, there's one thing O'Dell's probably not figured on . . . seven of us guys are playing our last game for old Midland and we're going to be heard from as we've never been heard from before! O'Dell's rubbed our noses into the dirt long enough. And here's where, to spring a new expression, that ‘the noses turn’!”

Five hundred Midland rooters, following their eleven to the town of the rival high school, were thrown into joyous hysterics six minutes after the start of the game when Chuck Parker uncorked an unexpected forward pass at mid-field which was caught by the finger tips of Speed Morris, left end, and carried thrillingly over O'Dell's goal line on ‘an open-field run marked by inspired interference. The Midland supporters went even wilder when Pink Newton added the extra point after touchdown on a perfectly executed place kick. And thus was

O'Dell's cockiness knocked into various shapes and sizes of cocked hats.

Score: Midland, 7; O'Dell, 0.

Ozzie Gray, seated next to Coach Adams on the bench, viewed the mad antics of Midland followers with knowing restraint. The game was young yet and Midland's great good fortune in scoring early meant that O'Dell would unloose the relentless, battering-ram attack for which she had been noted.

"Great headwork," approved Coach Adams, for his substitute quarter's benefit. "Chuck took the whole O'Dell team by surprise through pulling a forward so early in the game."

"He sure did," Ozzie admitted, and thought to himself. "But if I'd pulled that forward pass it would probably have grounded and I'd have been razzed for another prize bonehead!"

The O'Dell offensive kept the ball in Midland territory the remainder of the half but Midland, holding desperately, flashed a brand of defense which stopped the enemy three times within her ten-yard line, permitting Pink Newton to send the pigskin out of danger on beautifully placed and well-distanced punts.

"Some team out there to-day!" voiced a Midland rooter. "That lead was all the boys

needed to make them O'Dell's equal. Believe me, O'Dell's going to have all she can do to even the count, if she's able to do that!"

And through the third quarter the weight of this prediction began to be felt. Smashing Midland's line from end to end in a frenzied attempt to open up holes, the O'Dell eleven just could not seem to get going for any continued drive. The seven Midland veterans provided the majority in favor of a resistance which turned O'Dell back with heroic effectiveness.

"Atta way, gang!" grinned Pink, who was playing the game of his life behind the line. "Their noses! Rub 'em in!"

As the teams changed ends of the field for the final quarter, the Midland stands groaned at sight of Chuck Parker, limping.

"His trick knee!" exclaimed someone, knowingly. "Probably threw it out again! Oh, boy—hope this doesn't mean the old jinx! . . ." The voice left the thought unfinished, it seeming to blend into a great uneasy murmur.

Coach Adams himself could not conceal concern. He arose from the bench and paced along the side lines as play was resumed, with the O'Dell eleven being driven savagely by a wildly imploring cheering section.

“Touchdown!” shrieked O’Dell. “Give us a touchdown!”

And their eleven grim-jawed representatives on the field buckled down to another body-jarring attempt. A touchdown! It would take at least this much to tie against the toughest team that Midland had ever put on the grid-iron. But O’Dell was intensely jealous of her long and unbroken reign of triumphs. That this Midland team was the hardest nut of all to crack was all the more glory for the cracking. And . . .

“Yea!”

Midland’s cracking was starting. An O’Dell back skirting left end on a dodging, whirling run . . . five, ten, fifteen . . . look out! . . . Twenty . . . twenty-five . . . and a clear field! . . . But, no—Chuck Parker, limping across and diving . . . making a perfect tackle . . . throwing the O’Dell runner out of bounds!

“Yea, Chuck! Yea! Yea! Yea!” a thunderous roar of praise which the courageous Midland quarterback didn’t hear. He lay face down in a huddled heap.

Ozzie Gray, substitute quarter, turned his face away from the scene as a water boy went dashing from the side lines, the water sloshing

over the sides of the pail in great, spray-like spurts.

“Oh, my gosh!” Ozzie muttered, the veins at his temples taking on the pound, pound-pound of trip hammers. “I—I hope I don’t have to go in. I hope Chuck lasts it out. We can’t lose this game now . . . not after holding the lead like we have!”

Time out while Pink raised and lowered the prostrate form of Midland’s field general, bringing air back into winded lungs.

“Thank heavens!” cried the substitute quarter, venturing another glance. “I thought it was his leg!”

A cheer went up as Chuck was lifted to his feet and paraded about in circles, his arms over team-mates’ shoulders. But he trailed one leg as he walked.

“How you feeling?” asked Pink, anxiously.

“Pretty rocky!” admitted Chuck. “My knee! Gee, it’s just as if a knife . . .”

“Only twelve more minutes!” encouraged Pink, “You won’t have to do much, Chuck. We’re going to hold ’em. Stick her out!”

“Don’t worry, I’m sticking!” retorted the veteran quarterback, tight-lipped.

And a great sigh of relief went up as he limped back into position.

But O'Dell, having carried the ball to Midland's fifteen-yard line as a result of the twenty-five-yard run around end, was determined to score this time at all costs. And Midland, worn and battered from her long repulsing of the O'Dell steam roller, had not the strength left to withstand the terrific onslaught. Amid a riot of sound, O'Dell crashed through the line for a touchdown on the third down.

Score: Midland, 7; O'Dell, 6.

"Don't let 'em get that extra point!" cried Pink, staggering along the line and thumping the linesmen on the backs. "Break through there, you guys! Block that kick! They're not going to tie us. We're better'n they are! Block that . . ."

The ball snapped back and the O'Dell quarter caught it deftly, upending it for the kicker. But the Midland line, calling upon the last element of reserve, swept through in flood-like formation and smothered the try for goal. The Midland stands went wild and tears streaked the begrimed faces of team members in the delirium of their success.

“That wins for us!” yelled Pink. “They’ll never score again!”

Eight minutes more of play and Midland’s one-point lead now assumed mountain-like proportions but O’Dell, undismayed, lined up to receive the kick-off. Midland’s stone-wall defense was no longer puncture-proof. This much had at last been proven. The only question was—could it manage to impede O’Dell’s progress enough to hold the one-point advantage to the finish? And the answer was forthcoming within the next five minutes. It couldn’t—quite. It held sufficiently to convince O’Dell that trying for another touchdown would be foolhardy. So, on Midland’s twenty-two-yard line, O’Dell elected an attempt at field goal. The attempt was good.

Score: O’Dell, 9; Midland, 7.

“It’s all over now,” said a Midlandite, dejectedly. “The same old story!”

And O’Dell, with three minutes of play remaining, prepared to kick-off, radiating once more that cocksure spirit which had prevailed at the start of the game. It had been a tight squeeze but O’Dell, in keeping with past tradition, had come through. Let Midland put this in her pipe and smoke it.

It was Pink Newton who received the kick on his own seven-yard line and it was Pink who, falling behind a quickly forming, frenzied interference, zigzagged his way across chalk mark after chalk mark and, when it seemed that he must go down, electrified the stands by beautifully reversing his field.

"Go on!" screamed Midland, "*Go on!*" And Pink appeared to gain new impetus by the very force of the throat-tearing command.

At O'Dell's thirty-yard line, however, he was stopped after having made the longest run of the game—sixty-three yards in all.

"They're not going to rub our noses!" gasped Pink, dazedly. "Come on, you guys! Let's see a little fight!"

And Midland, with the hope born of despair, crashed through the O'Dell line to give Art Hill eleven yards and a first down!

"Yea, team! Yea! Yea! Yea!" cried the legion of five hundred, hysteria gripping O'Dell and Midland alike.

"Hold 'em!" begged the home supporters.

"Time out!" Chuck Parker down again. Trainer Eddy running out from the side lines to wind some more tape around the knee. Chuck was needed now as never before. Coach

Adams waited on the side lines, obviously worried. But play was resumed. Chuck was sticking in.

A fumble! The play mussed up somehow. And Midland's quarterback diving for the loose ball!

"He's out this time for sure," groaned a fan. "But, say—what a game he played!"

"All right, Ozzie!" crackled the coach's voice. "Go in for Chuck!"

It was history repeating itself. The substitute quarter had lived through this nightmare before. He jumped from the bench tremblingly and jerked off his sweater. A hand gripped his arm.

"And don't forget!" warned the coach's voice, "It's *second down!*"

Second down and two minutes to play! Midland had lost four yards on the recovered fumble. Ball on O'Dell's twenty-three-yard line. He mustn't make a bonehead this time. Not after the way the boys had fought to win. He must make up . . . somehow . . . for last year . . . for all the times before. But how . . . what? . . .

"A fake pass!" counseled Pink. "And a run around end!"

“No, no!” cried Stub.” A lateral . . . that triple pass behind the line!”

“Wait a second!” pleaded Art. “How about that ‘tackle back’?”

The substitute quarter looked his bewilderment. Team-mates crowded about. He had promised Chuck he would let his choice of plays be decided by the backfield. But the only way to follow these directions would be to take the plays suggested in order. And Ozzie wasn’t so sure that they were the right ones. He was thinking clearer now. This comparing of others’ suggestions with his own idea of what should be done, was proving a good thing. But following others’ suggestions, the substitute quarter decided, might not prove so good.

“Signals!” cried Ozzie, and called for the reverse play which he had gummed up in last season’s game.

The backfield responded . . . Stub setting off as though to carry the ball around left end, and passing to Art who lunged toward a hole good old Bill Nelson made for him through right tackle. This time Ozzie was well aware of what was expected of him . . . and smashed through as Art’s interference, blocking off two would-be tacklers to give Art a gain of six

yards. Eight more to go for a first down. O'Dell's goal line seventeen yards away.

"Signals!"

"Signals over!" cried Pink.

"Try a pass!" begged Stub. "We'll never make it unless . . ."

"Signals!" insisted Ozzie.

Pink Newton had been the most consistent ground gainer for Midland. And the substitute quarter had decided to risk the precious third down on a fake kick with the ball going to Pink at fullback position and Pink taking it on the run for a dash around right end.

"Block that kick!" screamed O'Dell rooters, suddenly paralyzed at the thought that a field goal could defeat their eleven by one point.

And O'Dell, wide-eyed and straining, tore through. The deception was all but perfect. Every Midland man did his part on interference. Led by Art and Ozzie, Pink swung out, evading all opposing linesmen.

"A clear field!" anticipated an overexcited rooter.

Desperate secondary defense men were forcing Pink more and more to the side, however, and first Art, then Ozzie, went down in valiant attempts to keep tacklers from reaching the

runner upon whom had been placed Midland's last pulsating hope of victory. Pink himself, trying to keep from going out of bounds, was thrown heavily after an angular run which had taken him to the side of the field for a gain of five yards.

"That ends it!" moaned a spectator. "Why the heck didn't Ozzie open up with passes? Some more of his *dumbness!*"

"Hey, Ozzie, this is *fourth down!*" called a voice which sounded not unlike that of last year's wit.

Singularly enough, the ball was close to the side lines again, *last down*, on O'Dell's twelve-yard line! And what play? *What play?* With everyone shouting at him . . . opposing team . . . his own team-mates . . . frenzied substitutes on the side lines . . . and the stands spitting sound. . . . *What play?* There was scarcely time for more than one play and the game would be over. Three yards to go for a first down but a first down would do no good now. A forward pass? A desperate chance. If it were grounded or intercepted, good-bye game. A field goal? Worth trying! Pink was one of the best kickers ever to play for Midland High. But . . .

And Ozzie's heart sank as he viewed the angle from which Pink would have to try for field goal. They were so far off to the side that the goal posts looked like a letter "H" turned almost sidewise.

"If we were only back another five yards," thought the substitute quarter, this sizing up of the situation occurring all in a fraction of time.

Last year he had pulled his prize boner, stepping out of bounds and sacrificing a down with the idea of putting the ball in a better position for Pink to kick. But there wasn't any down to be sacrificed. And an attempted field goal at this angle would be doomed to failure. How could it be worked?

"Play ball!" warned the referee.

"Signals . . ." shouted Ozzie.

Better try a pass after all. What was the use. No, no! Here it was! The idea! Wait!

"Signals over!"

"Hey! What's the matter with you?" gasped Pink. "Lost your head?"

"Come on, Ozzie! Let's have it!" snapped Art. "Time's . . ."

The referee's whistle screeched. With thirty

seconds left to play, the official dove in between the players, picked up the ball and paced back five yards, setting the pigskin down on O'Dell's seventeen-yard line.

"Well, can you imagine that!" exploded a voice. "The ref's penalized Ozzie five yards for delaying the game!"

"Some cheesy quarterback, he is!" condemned another.

On the bench Coach Adams exclaimed in disgust. Chuck Parker, under blankets, bowed his head, not caring to see the finish. A great, heart-rending groan volleyed from the Midland five hundred.

"Our four-letter man!" cried the voice of the originator, taking safety in numbers. "Is he *D-u-m-b*? Oh, is he *D-u-m-b*?"

But the substitute quarterback was unmindful of the razzing demonstration against him.

The moment the teams were lined up again he was all action. Where an instant before he had been halting, hesitant, dazed, seemingly paralyzed . . . he was now aggressively alert. To his team-mates who turned upon him with a howl of protest, he snapped. "Shut up, you guys! I'm running this team! Get back there

and hold that line! Pink, you're back to kick! Put her over, old boy! I've got you a better angle to shoot at!"

Pink gazed at Ozzie, open-mouthed.

"*Signals!*" yelled the substitute quarterback.

"*Kick formation, nineteen, eleven, three...*"

Automatically, as timers consulted their watches, Pink settled himself, held out his arms, took the perfect pass back from center, wheeled sidewise, sighted the slanting bar between the goal posts, and dropped the pigskin toward an upswinging toe. As he kicked, the substitute quarterback threw himself head foremost at two O'Dell foemen who had broken through. The three went down in a heap, the ball just grazing Ozzie's back as it lifted from the ground.

In a prone position, totally disregarding feet and arms which threatened to strike him in the face, Ozzie kept one eye far enough open to follow the path of the pigskin . . . to see it shave the goal post and go skimming over the bar for the three points which put Midland once more in the lead, 10 to 9. And, as teammates jerked him to his feet, embracing him madly, the whistle blew.

The following Monday, before the greatest

mass meeting ever held at Midland High, in which most of the townspeople also participated, one Ozzie Gray, substitute quarterback, had three of his four letters taken away from him, being left only with the letter "M." And it was humorously pointed out afterwards that the word "Dumb," minus the letter "M," pretty well described the wit who'd originated the four-letter award.

THE DESPISED SUBS

IRON men! Magic words, these—descriptive of the veteran players who made up the famous Willard College eleven, undefeated in two smashing seasons and well on their way toward the completion of a third spectacularly successful season of conquests.

“How you going to beat a squad of fellows who’ve eaten, slept and breathed football together for years?” was the dire plaint which arose from the supporters of trampled opponents.

Such was the awesome psychology which the mighty eleven of iron men had built up. The majority of their rivals were more than half defeated before appearing on the gridiron and the remainder succumbed on the field of battle, fighting valiantly, but cracking first under fire where experience was given its chance to tell.

“Thank heavens, this is the last year for this human steam roller!” remarked a Burton College fan, hopefully, “Willard’ll have to put an

entirely green team on the grid next, and then—oh, baby! what we won't do to them!"

Revenge! This was the underlying thought, the fervent desire, of every victim on Willard's schedule. The Iron Men, in their three years of rampage, had placed a blot upon the otherwise unblemished records of worthy foes, and these opponents, despairing of triumph in turn, had sought to console each other with the unionized slogan: "Beat Willard! We care not who of us does it—but, *beat Willard!*"

A cry, alas for them, which had gone unanswered, though many ambitious teams had heard the call and had entered the fray, heads high, in a vain attempt to achieve that which had not been achieved before.

"Pretty soft for Coach Tuttle!" laughed a Willard rooter. "He hasn't had anything to do for the past two seasons after developing this team. Of course, he's given the boys some new plays but they've pretty well taken care of themselves. And the way they've played, game after game, with scarcely a substitution—some fighting spirit! We'll probably never see the equal of this gang again."

Hardly any doubt about that. And, if Coach Tuttle had dared express himself on the sub-

ject, "Never again" would have been soon enough.

"The pupils have become greater than their master," mused the coach, with a trace of bitterness. "And that's ungrateful to say the least, if it isn't downright dangerous. They're getting so puffed up over their unbroken string of victories and this invincible stuff that's being handed them on every side, they think all they've got to do to win is trot out on the field and go through the motions. One of these days . . . oh, well, we'll let that pass. But what gives me the biggest pain is the attitude these iron idols of mine are taking toward the subs and second-string men. They've gotten the idea that eleven greater football players were never invented than themselves and to remove one of 'em from the line-up, unless he's suffering from broken kneecaps, cracked ribs or a fractured skull is a terrible and unforgivable offense. If I do overrule 'em and send in a sub, what happens? They ride the poor fellow to death till he pulls a boner which gives them the chance to chorus: 'See, what did we tell you?' And the rooters come in on the band wagon, 'Why doesn't coach leave well enough alone? He knows the original eleven can't be

beat. And mixing subs with iron men is like putting water in milk. No wonder the vets put up a holler. They don't want to see a winning combination broken!' So, what is a man, who is only the coach, going to do?"

Quite a problem, anyone would admit, if viewed from a certain pair of shoes. But when a team kept on winning, as Willard continued to do, any such outburst as Coach Tuttle had made to himself, would have been taken as sour grapes . . . a sort of lamentation that his veteran players were no longer actually dependent upon him . . . a confession that he felt himself to be more or less a useless fixture . . . and the revealing of a desire to be sharing more in the heaped up glory which was coming to Willard's men of iron. All this might have been thought of Coach Tuttle had he so much as opened his mouth. But the coach was far too wise for that.

"I'm not wishing the boys any hard luck," he said to himself on another occasion. "I hope they hang up their moleskins at the end of this season without ever having worn 'em in defeat. That would establish a record worth shouting about . . . a record which would no doubt stand for all time, so far as Willard is

concerned . . . and would find few equals anywhere in the country. But I can see trouble brewing for Willard. Every team on the schedule is pointing for us . . . making us the big game . . . crazy to knock us off. And let our supposed invincibles underrate just one of these teams and we're cooked. I look for a collapse one of these days as sensational as our winning streak. And when it comes . . . but, it *mustn't!*"

There was another who chafed under the reign of the Iron Men without making an outward murmur . . . Roxy Davis . . . a substitute backfield man who, in ordinary years at Willard, would have made the first team as a regular. He was small but fast and shifty, the sort often referred to as a "pony" back. And, because of the veteran strength of the original eleven, he was destined to spend most of his time on the bench, being unable to prove his real worth the few occasions of his being sent into battle for the reason that Willard usually had the game sewed up and the remaining members of the Iron Man backfield saw to it that he rarely was called on to carry the ball.

"Those birds have formed a 'better-than-

thou clique,' ” fumed Roxy. “And the guy on the outside has about as much chance as a drop of water on a hot stove. Got most of the subs buffaloed, too. Basking in ‘reflected glory’ stuff. But it’s not enough for me to be on the same squad with this Iron Man circus. I’ve got enough conceit to believe I’m good in my own name and I want to be given a chance to prove it. Here I am—my last year at Willard—and a sub for three seasons!”

Oh, yes—there was irony as well as iron men in the situation at Willard. And other subs felt the same as Roxy did, only they hadn’t gotten far enough along to put their feelings into words. Truth of the matter was, most of them were suffering from inferiority complexes due to having been so overshadowed by the Willard veterans. And several, on getting an opportunity to play, had performed miserably for no other reason than that they were practically paralyzed at the thought of not being able to match the game of their predecessors. This, of course, was particularly flattering to the Iron Men whose positions they took and gratifying to the veteran team as a whole.

Take the case of Rod Stoner, substitute quarterback, for instance. Every time he’d been

sent in for Iron Man Ginty Darrow, the back-field had slowed up and sure-fire plays had failed to gain. In Roxy's observant estimation, this was not so much because of the veterans' unfamiliarity with Rod's style of play as it was an evidence of their hide-bound allegiance.

"They just don't want to look as good with Rod in there," analyzed Roxy. "They figure, if they did, they'd be showing up one of their comrades and proving Ginty wasn't absolutely indispensable to the team. Oh, it's a great game they're playing—both ways. If they didn't have the stuff, they couldn't get away with it. But so long as they can keep on handing out victory packages, I suppose we've got to keep grinning and swallowing."

In union there was strength. The Willard Iron Men were proving this old statement over and over. And the fact that disgruntled substitutes had never raised their voices in protest, had kept them from organizing in their own defense. Instead each sub was serving almost in the capacity of a valet to some one of the Iron Men . . . loaning him a sweater . . . or a shoe . . . or a pair of trousers . . . or rendering some little service as the occasion

demanded. Speaking of "paying tribute to Caesar!" Roxy fairly burned up every time Hoops Lloyd, line-plunging fullback, shouted at him.

Hoops had taken a particular fancy to Roxy, singling him out, evidently, as his special man Friday. And because Hoops was also captain of the Iron Men, it was just possible that he had grown to imagine any of the despised subs would have been tickled at the favor he was showing Roxy. At least, this is the impression he gave by the condescending manner in which he addressed the backfield understudy.

But all things, according to geometry, approach their limit eventually and so a little incident which took place between the first and second quarters of the Willard-Nagle game may be accepted as significant.

The Iron Men were leading, 7 to 0, as they changed ends of the field, and Hoops, coming toward the side lines, made a megaphone of his hands to call at a certain glum figure on the Willard bench.

"Hey, Roxy! A shoe lace!" he cried. "Little pep!"

Crouching on one knee, the captain of the Iron Men started ripping off the broken lace,

taking the obedience of his order for granted. When ready for the new lace he looked up expectantly. Well! . . . What in thunder? For the first time, his man Friday had failed him. Perhaps he hadn't heard.

"Roxy! Hurry it up! I got to have a shoe lace!" shouted Hoops, looking about anxiously as the referee prepared to call time.

Fellow substitutes glanced curiously at Roxy as, face flushing, he straightened up, giving no sign of going to Hoops' assistance. Instead, Roxy made a megaphone of his own hands.

"A shoe lace?" he called back.

"Yes—a shoe lace!" gestured Hoops, impatiently. "For Pete's sake, Rox, can't you . . ."

But the captain of the Iron Men got no further. He was cut short by a withering and totally unexpected broadside:

"No, I can't! . . How would you like to get it yourself?"

Hoops, mouth open, looked his unqualified astonishment. Here was rank insubordination for you! Some unkind spectators added insult to injury by laughing, while a murmur of surprised comment spread through the stands. Hobbling to the referee, one shoe hanging

loose, a humiliated and enraged captain appealed for time out. And Trainer Eldred, making a hurried trip to the Field House, returned with the necessary lace while Coach Tuttle looked on with just the suspicion of amusement. As for Roxy, his revolt against the tyranny of the men of iron, stamped him at once as the leader of his fellow sufferers.

"Good boy, Roxy!" nudged Rod Stoner, who sat next to him. "Hoops has been lording it over you for two seasons. He had it coming to him."

"They've all got it coming to 'em!" said Roxy, grimly. "And I've decided I'm going to stand up for my rights from now on if I get kicked off the team. Might as well be off as on anyway, as seldom as we get a chance to play!"

"Right!" agreed Mel Corbin, substitute end. "And here's a brother who's with you!"

That was the beginning of a mild insurrection which made itself noticeable between halves when certain substitutes showed a sudden disinclination to assist in the rubbing down of certain important regulars.

"What the heck?" Quarterback Ginty Darrow wanted to know as he stretched himself out

on a rubbing table and Rod Stoner failed of his appointed duty. "Where's Rod? We got less than five minutes and I've a kink in my left leg."

"Rub it out," said a voice from behind a locker which Ginty couldn't identify. "Ain't it *your* leg?"

The veteran Willard quarterback sat up painfully and applied fingers to his lame leg muscle.

"Fine stuff, this is!" he complained. "We go out there and take all the dirt and you guys warming the bench can't even . . ."

"But ain't you *Iron Men*?" said the same sharpshooting voice from behind the locker, seeming to delight in its ungrammatical point-edness. "Why should *you* worry?"

Ginty Darrow leaped off the table and strode around the row of lockers. Nobody there. Whoever had been had anticipated attack by a speedy retreat to the shower room. And there, commingling with more than a dozen others, the offender was in position to defy discernment.

"The guy who said that deserves a smack on the beezer!" raged Ginty, exchanging glances with others of Willard's indignant Iron Men.

"See here, you fellows!" called Captain Hoops Lloyd, attempting to smooth matters over. "We don't mind a little joke, but lay off while a game is on, won't you? You're the old power behind the team, you know!"

"Bushwa!" sounded the voice, from a different location this time.

"All out! Second half!" came a cry from the door.

And eleven disgruntled Iron Men shuffled from the locker room, muttering among themselves.

The subs, meanwhile, evidenced signs of more merriment than they had shown in weeks. A worm was commencing to turn.

"No more this humble slave business!" denounced Rod Stoner. "Say, Roxy, those cracks you made were rich. I darn near laughed in Ginty's face."

"Good thing you didn't," grinned Roxy. "He might have slapped *yours*. And you'd probably never recover from being slapped by an Iron Man!"

Rod winced clownily at the very thought.

"One thing," emphasized Mel Corbin, substitute end, gleefully. "They acted almost lost without our help. Wonder if they'd feel so

much like Iron Men if we withdrew our support entirely?"

"Great idea!" endorsed Pink Middleton, guard. "Let's strike for shorter hours on the bench and longer hours on the field!"

"Hey! Hold on!" cautioned Roxy. "Not so fast! We don't want our revolution to overthrow Willard's chances of winning. All we want is recognition as . . . well . . . *free* and *equal* . . ."

"That this football team of the college, by the college, and for the college shall not perish!" paraphrased Rod.

"Yeah!" seconded Mel. "It is not for us to question why we are subs. But the fact remains, we are! And being subs, we must look to our rights!"

"Don't worry!" assured Roxy. "The cast Iron Men will never run over us again!"

Coach Tuttle, observing this new-found spirit in the subs, gave it his hearty but quiet endorsement. On the surface, he knew his attitude must be one of neutrality but the outburst had given the coach an idea as to a possible way to exert pressure on Iron Men

when that pressure might be sorely needed.

"The G.A.R. of Willard is slipping," said the coach, this comment coming after the veterans had barely nosed out a win over Nagle, 14 to 12. "They should have beaten their opponents to-day by a margin of three touchdowns. Good thing they weren't stacked up against Burton. That eleven's going to give us plenty of trouble this year. And unless I miss a shrewd guess, when we take on Burton, the Iron Men will be glad of the reënforcements on the bench."

But, would they? Following the Nagle game the Willard veterans held a specially called indignation meeting with Iron Man Ginty Darrow acting as chairman.

"Pretty rotten!" denounced Ginty. "But I've felt it coming for some time, men . . . for some time! I suppose I should have mentioned it but I kept hoping it would blow over. I somehow didn't like to think that any loyal son of Willard would permit himself to be actuated by jealousy! . . ."

"That's it—jealousy!" emphasized Captain Iron Man Hoops. "That's what's the trouble with the whole sub outfit! They're absolutely

green with envy. And since they can't show us up on the field, they've organized to make us look bad on the bench."

"Well, I say don't pay any attention to 'em," counseled Iron Man Bud Neale, left half. "Let on that we don't notice their slights. If we raise a fuss, it'll only encourage 'em."

"Now, there's a good idea!" approved Iron Man Sandy Kaufman, right half. "Let's give them the big go-by, gang. We can forget more football in five minutes than they can learn all season. And if this is the thanks we get for treating 'em right . . . well, we've just about played through three years together without a defeat and any time we can't finish what we started . . ."

"You said it!" broke in Chairman Ginty Darrow. "We've got the upper hand and we deserve it. Our Willard eleven is more than just a team . . . it's become an institution . . . and who's made it what it is to-day? We have! We've got a name that strikes fear in the hearts of our enemies like a Notre Dame! Are our opponents afraid of substitutes? No! They're afraid of us! We weren't called 'Iron Men' for nothing!"

"You bet not!" insisted Captain Hoops.

“We worked for that recognition and we’re not going to let any subs spoil our record! It’s up to us to see this thing through together!”

And with only one game remaining to be played, that with the rival Burton College, it appeared as though Willard’s famous Iron Men were to last through the season even though, as Coach Tuttle had told himself, “They were slipping.” Newspapers, however, failed to take note of any falling off in form, sports writers seeing only the brilliant approach Willard’s veterans were making toward an untarnished and hitherto unheard-of record. True, the Iron Men had not been turning back their opponents with the same ease of the previous two seasons, but a reason was pointed out for this which reflected even greater credit upon the veterans of Willard. Opposing elevens had been drilled particularly with the Willard game in mind, the Willard style of play had been studied with painful concentration, and every battering force of each team had been hurled against the impregnable iron wall. Beat Willard? This frenzied opposition had only served to strengthen her . . . except as the monotonous repetition of victories was also develop-

ing an attitude of extreme confidence. In the minds of Willard's eleven men, the thought became traditional, "We cannot be beaten!" Followers of the Blue and Gold had come to feel the same way about it. "The Wonder Eleven!" was an expression commonly heard in praise of Willard. And the substitutes? . . . Whoever mentioned them?

"Fellows, there's no getting around it," said Roxy, with an air of despondency. "We're the helpless victims of a circumstance that's not likely to happen again in the whole history of Willard. Our system of laying off the eleven of the high and mighty didn't work. They acted crippled for a day or so but as soon as they got used to waiting on themselves it made 'em more self-sufficient than ever. Has anybody anything to suggest?"

"I have!" volunteered Rod, gloomily. "What do you say we all start taking iron for our blood?"

"Aw, Rod, for Pete's sake!" reprimanded Roxy, "Be sensible!"

"That's what I *am* being!" retorted the substitute quarterback. "It's the surest and quickest way I know for us to become Iron Men,

too! Then those goofs won't have any excuse to keep us from filling in!"

Rod's plan drew howls of laughter on a subject that was actually no laughing matter. There were miles of difference between being glorified and despised. And the subs had been long suffering. . . .

Iron! The word fairly clanked from the lips of the greatest crowd ever to witness a football game in the historic Willard bowl. Would iron be able to withstand the white heat of Burton, boiling and seething under the red-hot sting of two smashing defeats at the hands of these same eleven men? A Burton desperately determined to-day, steamed up with a mighty resolve, conscious that this was the last glistering opportunity to bow the proud heads of a previously unbending foe! Other teams might take consolation in drubbing Willard's next season eleven of green men, but not Burton. Willard's greatest rival was out to punish her actual persecutors, ready to send three complete teams against the Iron Men . . . three teams comprised of fresh, eager, steel-limbed youngsters—hopeful of making up in energy what they lacked in experience.

“Wear ’em down!” was Burton’s secret battle cry. “Wear ’em down! The Iron Men are growing old. Wear ’em down!”

Horatius at the bridge! How those Iron Men did hold against the furious and bewildering assault which was sent pounding at them, in the first quarter against Burton’s second team; in the second quarter against Burton’s first team . . . and in the third . . .

Coach Rand of Burton was dashing aside all precedents, openly refusing to consider the type of opposition his team was supposed to be encountering. It was the first time since the Iron Men’s first game together that they had been opposed by any but the best that the enemy could muster, and this sending in of Burton’s second eleven against them was a piece of strategy which fell little short of a direct insult.

“They’ll pay for this!” vowed Captain Hoops.

But somehow, Burton’s payment was deferred, for the first half ended nothing to nothing with Willard’s Iron Men having been placed on the defensive practically from the start.

“Just playing with ’em!” Ginty Darrow ex-

plained to the coach between halves. "We'll murder 'em this next quarter. You watch!"

Coach Tuttle did. So did nodding substitutes. And what the coach and the substitutes saw was murder all right but murder on the wrong side the fence.

What's that? Yes, sir! Unbelievable but nevertheless true. Willard's famous Iron Men, on the brink of attaining the Immortality of the Undefeated, were being battered and smashed by a foe gone madly, hysterically wild. Faced with new shock troops almost every five minutes, the Iron Men were forced to give ground, inch by inch, foot by foot, yard by yard . . . and then in great broken stretches.

"Wear 'em down!" sounded Burton's battle cry.

And the rival cheering section went into assorted deliriums as their second team went over the line for a touchdown with twelve minutes of the third quarter gone.

"Our time's coming!" said Rod Stoner, excitedly, moving over on the bench to nudge Roxy.

"Coming!" snorted the substitute fullback. "Our time's *here!* There! They've kicked goal, seven to nothing! What's the coach

waiting on? It'll be a parade from now on! Those Iron Men are through!"

But Coach Tuttle knew what he was doing. As Burton and Willard lined up with Burton preparing to kick off, the coach kept a wary eye on the line of restless, heart-palpitating substitutes who leaned further and further forward, taking in the unfolding scene before them in quick, hungry glances. In spirit the subs, despised by the eleven veterans, were a pack of caged tigers. They had been held in leash so long that the slightest prospect of freedom . . . of being permitted to tear loose . . . had caused them to be all but clawing the air.

"See! They can't get started! Look at that Burton line charge through! I tell you—our Iron Men are done!" reiterated Roxy.

"They're punting!" exclaimed Rod. "Gee, this is going to be a tough one to lose. Think of it, guys—if *we* were in their shoes! Hadn't been beaten in three years . . . and now . . . playing the last game for old Willard! . . ."

"Razzberries!" scorned Mel Corbin. "They are just getting what's coming to 'em! . . ."

"No, they're not," defended Roxy. "That's what I said the other day but I . . . maybe we didn't get a square deal. That's neither here

nor there now. Willard's going down to defeat! Do you get that? Burton's breaking the hoodoo of the Iron Men. Look at 'em smash through! They're making a sieve out of that line. Oh, why don't the coach . . . ?"

As if divining the thoughts of his nerve-taut substitutes, Coach Tuttle swung about suddenly.

"Roxy!" he called.

The substitute fullback leaped to his feet.

"Go in for Hoops!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Wait a second!" The coach put out a restraining hand as Roxy, peeling his sweater, started out on the field. Fellow substitutes followed after, eyes on the coach, eyes pleading a like chance. Burton was tearing off gain after gain. A few more plays and the Iron Men would be forced to surrender another touchdown.

"Listen, Roxy!" commanded the coach: "I'm sending you in with special instructions! . . ."

"Yes, sir!" The reply was snapped impatiently with the substitute back dancing in his eagerness to be gone.

"I'm sending you in," repeated the coach.
"To play football with your tongue!"

"What!"

Roxy wheeled, forgetting the game temporarily, staring perplexedly. Fellow substitutes reflected his shocked surprise.

"You heard me. With your *tongue!* Rip those Iron Men to pieces. Tell 'em what you really think of 'em! Tell 'em what you fellows have been saying about 'em behind their backs! You're going in for their captain. That's going to be hard enough for them to swallow. But make them swallow *more!* . . ."

Roxy's eyes widened.

"But, coach, I . . ."

"Snap it up! That's orders, and if you don't follow 'em, I'll send somebody in who will!"

Roxy gasped, then bit his lips.

"Yes, sir!"

And with the shrill of the referee's whistle he was off across the field.

"Well, what do you know about that?" exclaimed Rod Stoner, as fellow substitutes watched the flying figure.

"I know this," spoke up Mel Corbin. "If

coach really meant what he said, Roxy's the boy who can tell 'em plenty!"

The instructions given the substitute full-back who had yearned for his chance were possibly the most unique and likewise the most difficult of any commands ever handed out by a coach. Roxy had vowed he would show those Iron Men something if he should get in the game and, had the coach exhorted him to give all he had, he would have done this gladly . . . done this even without exhortation. But—to play football with his tongue! Of all odd requests! A despised sub, telling a team of hard-boiled veterans what he thought of them!

It was Burton's ball on Willard's fifteen-yard line and another first down, with forty seconds remaining of the third quarter, when one Roxy Davis reported to the referee.

"Going in for Hoops Lloyd," he announced.

The referee jogged over and tapped the captain of the Iron Men on the shoulder.

"Side lines for you."

Captain Hoops, dirt-grimed and disheveled, scowled and shook his head.

"Not *me!*"

“Yes, you!”

Ten grim, game comrades of their Iron Man leader, gathered around in protest.

“What’s this?” demanded Quarterback Ginty Darrow. “Coach taking you out? He can’t do that!”

“ ‘Course he can’t!” fumed Sandy Kaufman, right half. “You’re playing all right!”

Captain Hoops stepped over toward the substitute whom he now despised more than ever.

“You go on back to the bench!” he ordered. “Tell coach not to worry. We’re . . .”

“Side lines for you or take a penalty for delaying the game!” warned the referee.

The Iron Men consulted one another with glances which revealed frank concern. A five-yard penalty placed the ball within ten yards of the goal. And five yards, with the way Burton was traveling, was considerable!

“But I . . . there’s some mistake! . . .” protested Captain Hoops. “We’ve always . . .”

Without more ado, the referee picked up the ball and paced off the penalty. Roxy, seeing this, grinned.

“All right!” decided Captain Hoops, in a rage, “I’m going out, gang! But I’ll be back! Hold that old line!”

If feeling could have been expressed in temperature, the atmosphere surrounding Roxy, as he took his position on secondary defense, would have been some degrees below zero. And as play was resumed, a furious Iron Man bitterly assailed a coach who had suddenly moved to assert the authority of an iron hand.

As for the substitute back, immediately following Burton's first down which netted six yards, placing the ball on Willard's four-yard mark, Roxy opened a surprise verbal attack.

"What's the matter with you guys? Some Iron Men, you are! Letting Burton walk through you like this! You know what? You birds are rusting!"

"Aw, dry up!"

"That's a fact—*rusting*! You're a bunch of has-beens! Been playing this year on your *rep* . . . but it's not going to win this game! No, sir! You've got to play football!"

"Shut your face! I'm doing the talking for this team!" snapped Quarterback Ginty. "Come on, guys! Hold that line!"

"Hold? . . . Ha! Ha! They couldn't even hold hands! . . . Look at that!"

Burton through to the one-yard line. Mad cheering. Time called. Third quarter over.

Two minutes for changing ends of the field.

"Heh! Heh! Iron Men!" taunted a hilarious Burton supporter. "Where do they get that iron stuff? When our boys get through with 'em, there won't be anything left but a molten mass!"

Trudging to the other end of the field, ten aroused Iron Men clustered about a loud-mouthed sub, gesturing and exclaiming angrily in answer to his blazing denunciations.

"We'll get you after the game!" promised Bud Neale, left half.

"Yeah? Well, I'll take you all on at once after the game!" accepted Roxy. "You're taking a nice lacing right now and it'll be a cinch to give you another. You guys are vets all right. You ought to be on the retired list!"

"Say! Just when did *you* ever do anything!" fired Quarterback Ginty.

"Just when did you birds ever give me a chance!" rejoined Roxy. "Just give me the ball . . . if you're able to get it again . . . and I'll show you what I can do!"

"Oh, you will, eh? All this beefing over *what?* . . . Who do you think you are? . . . Who gave you the license to blow off? . . . What's a one-touchdown lead?"

"You mean a *two*-touchdown lead!"

"One!"

"It'll be *two* on the next play!"

And it was. Burton, not to be denied, just managed to push the pigskin over the line on a furious charge through the center of the line.

"What did I tell you?" razzed the substitute back. "Iron Men! Ha! Ha! Ha! You know what you're getting to be? Iron *babies*!"

Wrathfully, Iron linesmen dug tired toes into the sod and strained against the whiplash Burton lines as the Burton kicker prepared for his try at goal.

"Block that kick!" begged the now forlorn Willard stands.

"Iron *babies*!" charged a rasping voice from the backfield.

"See that, coach!" shouted an outraged Iron Man on the side lines. "There's a touchdown that's a gift. Wouldn't have happened with me in there. We were all set to turn the tables! All set to hold and take the ball away from Burton and rush 'em off their feet the last quarter! But now you've broken the combination! . . ."

"Sit down!" ordered the coach, eyes on the play.

And a great, throbbing shout went up as the Willard line, looking like the Iron Men of old, swept aside the Burton defense and smashed through to smother the attempted kick.

Score, Burton, 13; Willard, 0.

"Well, how'd you ever do it?" razzed Roxy.
"What an accident!"

Icy stares from men too tired to give answer, contemptuous stares which bespoke plainer than words their cordial dislike for the unwelcome figure in their ranks.

Burton kicking off and the ball going to Ginty Darrow. Iron Man interference forming grimly in front, the despised sub joining in.

"Come on, Ginty! Here we go! Follow me!"

Five, ten, fifteen yards toward the Burton goal and Ginty's interference falling off, one by one, until Roxy—the only protector of the Iron Man with the ball!

The Willard stands came up on their feet with a roar as Iron Man Ginty, following close on the heels of the unwelcome substitute, passed mid-field.

"Go on—you Iron Man!" they entreated.

And Ginty went on, only because the fellow ahead of him kept bumping the tacklers out of his way.

Captain Hoops Lloyd, on the side lines, even suspended his raving to follow the marvelous open-field run.

“Good boy, Roxy! Lay ’em low! Look out, Ginty! . . . Give ’em the straight arm! . . . Atta boy! . . . Go on! Touchdown!”

A groan as the substitute interferer, forced toward the side lines, threw himself in front of two would-be tacklers and went to earth, almost out of bounds on Burton’s thirty-yard line. Now Iron Man Ginty was out on his own!

Five more yards and a frantic Burton back, cutting across the gridiron, dove viciously. The impact as he clipped Ginty’s feet out from under him was heard above the excited roar of the crowd. And Ginty, falling heavily, lay where he fell.

“He’s out!” cried a hysterical voice, as the Willard rooters cheered his name.

Iron Man Ginty being led to the side lines, sobbing at being taken from the game, protesting that he was all right.

“Never had to be taken out in my life!” he insisted. “It’s a frame-up. You can’t hurt us! We’re like iron!”

Captain Hoops meeting Ginty at the side

lines, putting an arm around him consolingly.

“Great run, Ginty, old iron horse!”

“Great run, the dickens! They’re taking me out, Hoops! Taking me out! My last game!”

Tears streaming down Captain Hoops’ face. Coach Tuttle tapping Quarterback Rod Stoner on the shoulder and another despised substitute going in with the smell of iron in his nostrils.

Ball on Burton’s twenty-five-yard line. Eight minutes left of the last quarter. Score, Burton, 13; Willard, 0.

“Come on, you iron babies! Here’s your chance now. Let’s see what you’re going to do with it!” The unmerciful razzing of that guy! “You’re up against a real team now. You’ve been winning against a lot of push-overs this season. But you don’t catch Burton curling up and playing dead just because they’re facing Iron Men! Oh, no! Burton’s been taking you for a nice sleigh ride! And wouldn’t they like to be the first team to rub your noses in the dirt! . . .”

“Signals!” Substitute Rod Stoner in the quarterback position. A play around end, Left

Half Iron Man Neale carrying the ball. Slow in getting under way. Two-yard loss.

Another play, criss cross, with Right Half Kaufman on the receiving end. Kaufman dropped for a one-yard loss. Great cheers from the Burton stands.

"What's the matter with you guys? Chained to your posts?" bawled a voice. "Rod's calling the same plays, isn't he? Then what you sulking because Ginty's out for? Snap into it! Give me that ball, Rod, and I'll show these cast-iron dummies how to go through!"

A furious Iron Man line opened up a hole and a despised substitute back shot through for a seven-yard gain. Fourth down and six yards to go.

"See that?" blazed the voice. "It's a cinch!"

"Yeah!" fired Left Guard Iron Man Hansen, "But *we* did that. *You* didn't!" He reeled drunkenly as he spoke and Roxy, stepping over, pushed him back down on the line.

"Is that so? Well, let's see you do it again!"

Another big hole and the substitute back galloping through for eight yards and a first down on Burton's thirteen-yard line.

"We'll show you, you big stiff!" threatened Iron Man Hansen. "Iron babies, hey? . . ."

Coach Rand of Burton sending in a completely fresh line to check Willard's inspired advance. But Willard's Iron Men, caught up at the moment when they were about to snap like a rubber band which has been stretched to the breaking point far too long, called upon a reserve . . . that fighting ounce of reserve which had made them famous.

And, driven by the voice of a pilot new to them . . . smarting under the sting of a second voice, not so new, in that it seemed they had been hearing it for eternity, nine Iron Men hurled themselves into every play with ferocious abandon.

Is it any wonder then that the fresh Burton line was made to bend and quiver and break and give ground and finally to flatten out as though crushed by a steam roller while the Willard backfield (you couldn't tell whether Iron Men or substitutes), trampled through for gain after gain? .

In five plays the pigskin was pushed over for a touchdown and the Iron Men, holding firmly, kept the enemy from breaking through while substitute Rod Stoner upended the ball to per-

mit substitute Roxy Davis to put over a perfect place kick.

Score, Burton, 13; Willard, 7. Four minutes of play remaining.

"Well, it's about time!" was Roxy's comment as nine badly fagged Iron Men dragged themselves down the field to line up for the next kick-off. Willard kicking off to Burton.

And more substitutes coming out. Big Pink Middleton going in for Iron Man Hansen who had played a whale of a game at left guard and who was all but out on his feet. Hansen whimpered childishly as he was led to the side lines to join two Iron Men comrades, now somewhat reconciled to their fate.

"I'm all right! What they taking me out for? Didn't I open up all the holes?"

"Yea, Hansen! Iron Man! Yea!" roared the Willard stands.

"That's right . . . Iron *Man!*" blubbered Hansen, and slumped to the ground, being carried to the bench by Ginty and Captain Hoops.

It was a game to try the marrow of any man, whether of vaunted iron or nerves of steel or any term that might have been applied to indicate the last degree of courage and stamina.

And that Willard's Iron Men had stood up this well against the terrific pounding of a Burton horde, was nothing short of monumental. There was no disgrace now, in that, for the final desperate drive, Coach Tuttle considered it wise to remove the remaining two of Willard's Iron Men backfield, replacing them with fresh, hot-blooded substitutes who bounded from the bench as though shot from guns.

A great din as Right Half Kaufman and Left Half Neale, arms about one another and limping, heads down, their faces tear-streaked, left the field of honor, never again to carry Willard's banner in battle.

And here was Roxy's greeting to the wide-eyed substitutes, who came running out to take their places.

"Listen, you fellows! You know whose shoes you're filling? We got to get another touchdown . . . for them! We got to! You hear me?"

The substitutes nodded, lips pressed tightly together, fingers twitching. .

The kick-off! Maddening sound. Eleven Willard men dashing through a broken field in an effort to reach the Burton man with the

ball and down him as near his own goal as possible.

A great roar as substitute Quarterback Stoner made the tackle, bringing the runner down on Burton's seventeen-yard stripe.

"They'll punt!" cried a Willard fan, nervously. "And it'll be all over!"

But Burton elected to kill time by carrying the ball. Two downs which ate into the waning minutes and gained but three scant yards. And now—a punt.

Roxy running along behind the veteran line, kicking the crouched Iron Men, exhorting them to get through.

"Block that kick!" he ordered. "Let's see what stuff you're made of! It's good-bye game if you don't!"

How the Iron Men were able to muster sufficient strength of will and body to do it, those looking on could hardly conceive, but a great gap appeared in the Burton line through which the backfield figures of substitutes Rod and Roxy dashed. It was Rod who hurled himself in front of the kicker and took the force of the punted ball on his chest. And it was Roxy who fell on the ball as it bounded to the side.

Willard's ball on Burton's nine-yard line and

a minute and a half to play! Five Iron Men on the side lines gone mad.

Nothing comparable to this last quarter drive had ever been seen in the historic Willard bowl.

"Iron Men going out in a blaze of glory!" murmured a spectator, mistily.

And now, Roxy, who had followed coach's orders to play football with his tongue, changed the tone of his voice in a fervent appeal, directed at the grim-jawed veterans on the line.

"Fellows, it's all up to you! You give us the holes and we'll do the rest. Come on, you Iron Men! You've never lost a game! And you're going to win this one! *Come on!*"

A battle-scarred Monitor, manned by a substitute crew and yet straining every seam to deliver that crew to a port but nine yards distant. An iron-decked line that plowed through a sea of Burton legs and arms . . . all seeking to obstruct the passage of the pigskin runner! Breathless suspense as the one-yard mark was reached with ten seconds left to play . . . and then an insane outburst as the Burton line was swept aside by a surging tidal wave of iron-visaged forms as the old Monitor beached itself

to land its crew of recruits high and dry behind the goal posts!

Score, Burton, 13; Willard, 13.

But the scorer had scarcely more than changed the figures when he was called upon to change them again for there was no holding Willard's Iron Men now, nor no restraining of Roxy's toe which place-kicked unerringly the goal which gave to his veteran comrades their margin of victory.

Willard, 14; Burton, 13.

And as for the threat, made in the heat of battle, that the Iron Men would "get" Roxy after the game! They "got" him all right . . . and they "got" the rest of the substitutes, too . . . clubbing them so gratefully and so warmly on their backs that the thoroughly despised subs felt quite beaten up, it being pretty generally agreed that they could not have stood the punishment had they not been Iron Men themselves!

TWENTY POUNDS TO GAIN!

“Too bad, Corky, old man!” It was Coach Everett of Princeton High speaking and there was genuine sympathy in his voice. “But you’re twenty pounds under what you should be to stick on the squad. I’ll have to let you out.”

The blue eyes of the thin-faced, sandy-haired youth glistened. He bit his lips to keep back the quiver of disappointment. Heavier teammates looked on with a sense of helplessness.

“Oh, well, Corky!” called one, with attempted lightness of spirit. “You’ve still got another year! Cheer up! Start eating yeast cakes . . . and who knows—next season you may be . . .” The jester did not have the heart to finish.

Turning slowly about on his heel, chin resting against chest, the rejected candidate for the position of quarterback took himself from the field. A murmur of regret came involuntarily from the members of the squad. There wasn’t

a brighter, more likable fellow in school than Corky Hobbs. Wasn't it tough that he only weighed one hundred and fifteen pounds?

Coach Everett, looking after Corky, shook his head.

"Twenty pounds on that boy would help like blazes. He's fast on his feet and naturally athletic. But it would be nothing short of suicide to put his featherweight anatomy up against the average bulks in football. They'd either break him in two or squash him flat!"

That it was a kindness to have turned Corky down, Coach Everett had no doubt. It was evident that Corky had not considered his dismissal in that light. But the chances were, when time improved Corky's perspective, that he would appreciate the sanity of the coach's action. After all, football or any other sport, was for those who could safely enjoy it. It was part of Coach Everett's responsibility to determine this and he had ruled, in this case, against one whom he adjudged too frail to "stand the gaff."

"Go home and put on more beef!" Coach Everett had instructed the selfsame individual the year before.

Corky Hobbs had withdrawn readily enough

then, with just the suggestion of a wistful smile, as though he realized his own inadequateness but had just been hoping against hope. And no one except himself knew of the effort he had made, in the time between, to put meat on his slender frame. He had fairly gorged himself with every kind of fattening food; had developed a sudden, unquenchable craving for milk, and had faithfully tried out certain highly advertised fads on "how to gain weight quickly." All to no purpose. His system had just simply refused to get excited. And now he had reported for the first football practice of the new season with only one extra pound to show for his year of forced appetite and hard labor. One hundred and fifteen pounds! A giant straining for action in a pygmy body!

"Why is it that the small fellow always has to get it in the neck?" Corky asked himself, bitterly. "Is it my fault that I'm small? Did I ask to be little? I can play rings around some of those big guys right now! 'Fraid I'd get hurt! They'd have to catch me before they could fall on me, wouldn't they? And would I have to buck the line at quarterback? No! But you bet your life I'd run the ends. Is a jack rabbit easy to tackle? Besides, I'd be

using my noodle most of the time, not my weight. A fellow doesn't have to have a fat head to play quarterback. They're all wrong! And I'm going to prove it to 'em!"

Corky stopped in his tracks at the edge of the field. His face brightened as a thought occurred to him. He stood for a moment, staring unseeingly ahead.

"Wow! . . . I'm dumb! Why didn't I think of this before? . . . Sure it'll work! I can gain twenty pounds easy! But I'll have to go away from home next summer. Perhaps get a job as water boy with the section gang building the new spur railroad. Out of doors in the open all day, sleeping in a tent at night . . . I'll come back next fall, hard as molten lead!"

And forthwith the deep gloom which had enveloped the lightweight candidate for quarterback lifted like a runaway balloon.

Fellow students gasped in unqualified surprise at the Corky Hobbs they saw the following fall. In fact, it took two glances for them to be sure the person they were looking at actually *was* Corky. In the first place, Corky's skin was bronzed . . . a burnt-red bronze . . . as though the sun had scorched the skin raw

and then toughened it instead of deepening the coloring as was customary with those of darker complexion. Being unusually fair-skinned, Corky had paid a suffering price for his coat of tan. But the ruddier glow gave the face a healthier and fuller appearance. In addition there was unmistakable evidence that Corky had filled out, especially across the shoulders and chest.

“Heavy lifting did it,” Corky explained, quietly, to all inquiries. “And work out in the sun. You can’t beat old Mother Nature as a builder if you only give her a chance!”

“Apparently not!” observed Seedy Hayes, two-hundred pound fullback, slapping Corky resoundingly on the back. “You’re pretty solid, all right! I’m darn glad to see it. Guess the coach can’t keep you from trying out for the team this year!”

“Not unless he bars me because I haven’t cut my wisdom teeth yet,” grinned Corky.

Throughout the early part of September and before the first call for football, Corky Hobbs was the object of considerable curiosity and much comment. Everyone had to give the fellow credit for his never-give-up spirit in going out after a position on the eleven. And now

that he had succeeded in putting on needed weight, the entire Princeton student body was behind his candidacy for the team.

"Sure hope you make it!" said one.

"We're pulling for you!" cheered another.

"You certainly deserve a shot this year!" proclaimed a third.

To all of which, Corky Hobbs bowed his humble thanks and went his quiet way. Who'd have thought that such a little incident as a person gaining weight could excite a whole school? Yet Corky, secretly, was elated. He had wanted everyone to know of his development and to talk about it.

It was Coach Everett's custom, the first night of practice, to weigh every member of the squad in and to keep a record of the individual weights as the season progressed. Each candidate stepped on the scales, stripped, of course. This ceremony was attended not without considerable merriment. This year, however, the interest was not so much a matter of individual weights as it was how much Corky Hobbs would tip the scales at.

"It's remarkable—the pounds he's picked up!" said Sly Ellis, right half, to the veteran

members of the squad as all were undressing in the clubhouse, preparatory to checking up their own weights. "Did it in a little more than three months, too! And doesn't he look 'hard'? Have to hand it to Cork! He's *there!*"

"*Where?*" asked Bolt Mason, last year's center and the heaviest man on the team. "I don't see him any place. He hasn't showed up yet. Maybe he's decided now that he's got too *good* a form for football!"

"He'll be here, don't worry!" assured Seedy Hayes, pulling off a shoe. "He's probably out eating a stalk of bananas so's to be absolutely certain of getting by."

Coach Everett put an end to the joshing by stepping up suddenly with an admonition for the candidates to "snap it up."

"Little speed! Get in line, you fellows! Who's going to be the first man on the scales—Corky Hobbs?"

A laugh went up, followed by an expectant pause. Then a voice.

"Not here, sir!"

The coach looked his surprise.

"That so? Well, I thought, from what I'd heard, that he'd be camping on my trail. All right, Ellis! . . . Pretty good! You haven't

gained and you haven't lost. How do you feel?"

"Good for ten touchdowns!"

"A game?"

"Naw—a season! Good night! I raised myself *two* at that!"

The weighing went on at a rapid pace. Coach Everett possessed the happy faculty of being one with the boys, yet he retained that certain quality of reserve which commanded their admiration and respect. In the flurry of the weighing, Corky's absence was, for the time, forgotten.

"Last but not least," said the coach as Bolt Mason, Princeton center, lifted his ponderous frame onto the scales.

"Whew! Fifteen pounds over last year! Two hundred twenty-seven!"

Those among the first to be weighed were now struggling into their football togs but they came out from between the lockers to take a peep at the elephant of the squad. And as they did so they discovered a bronzed-faced individual, already in moleskins, standing quietly in the doorway, looking on.

"Well, if there ain't Corky!"

“Hey, what *you* doing all dolled up? Get those duds off! You gotta weigh in!”

The fellow who had failed to make the squad the past two seasons because of his light weight, shook his head and grinned.

“Not me! I’ve got my twenty pounds extra this year and I’m not going to be hoodooed by any pair of scales!”

Coach Everett pursed his lips. He had been in sympathy with Corky and his struggle to make the squad but here was a case of mild bolshevism. A fellow coming in late and dressing for the field without first having registered his weight! Was Corky just trying to be funny or was he lacking in a knowledge of the discipline expected of squad members? Coach Everett hesitated, on the verge of a reprimand. But Corky’s inoffensive grin dissuaded him.

“See here, Cork, since when did you figure you were a favored character? Come over here!”

“Make him take his clothes off!” cried Bolt Mason, “Penalize that bird!”

“No—we won’t be too hard on Corky at the start,” smiled the coach. “Step on these scales, young man, and let’s see if you weigh enough this year!”

Corky came over slowly.

"Gee, coach, you don't know how I hate to do this!" he said.

The candidates crowded about the scales evidencing great interest. Why should Corky be so reluctant about being weighed? Anyone could tell at a glance that he was considerably heavier than he had ever been before.

At the scales Corky halted and gave one last, appealing glance at the coach.

"*Must I?*" he asked.

For answer a dozen hands reached out and pushed him on! Instantly the sensitive indicator on the dial did a startled flip flop and wavered by degrees down to a quivering stop. When it came to rest at a certain figure there were gasps of pleased surprise.

"Holy smoke!"

"Who'd a'thought it!"

"Corky weigh that much? Why that's impossible!"

Even Coach Everett, who had been willing to concede that the formerly too-light candidate had taken on greater ruggedness, was hardly prepared for this evidence of his actual poundage.

"One hundred forty-eight!" he exclaimed,

and looked twice to be sure that no sympathizing candidate had his foot on the scales.

"Now is everybody satisfied?" kidded Corky, stepping off the scales with the air of one excessively bored by such proceedings.

"No, we're not!" geyed Lester Bell, veteran right end. "That weight's too good to be true! We'd like to see the undressed figures! . . ."

Corky's face colored.

"Well, if I've got to prove it to you . . ." he retorted, making a move to peel his jersey.

Coach Everett restrained him.

"Never mind, Corky! Lester's only joshing. Those scales don't lie. I can't keep you from trying out for the team this year! And I'm mighty glad I can't."

Corky, hands over head, about to "skin the cat," pulled his jersey back into place and eyed his fellow candidates with a "now-will-you-be-good?" expression. Then he turned to the coach and bestowed a look of appreciation.

"Thanks for *them* kind words. I just hope you can't keep me from making the team, either!"

The candidates scattered good-naturedly, most of them for out of doors and the football field. There would not be much in the way of

practice to-night except light passing, kicking and running—all designed to unkink muscles grown taut from lack of use.

But the fellow whose phenomenal increase in weight had elected him to the squad, lagged behind. In a secluded corner of the dressing room, screened by a locker door, he lifted his jersey, cautiously revealing a close-fitting, corset-like band which buttoned up the front. Hastily unfastening this, Corky dropped it in the bottom of his locker. The vest, striking the metallic floor, gave back a dull, clanking sound. Startled, Corky glanced about. Satisfied that no one was looking, he quickly drew forth from his locker what appeared to be an identical vest—except that, by the way he handled it, the second vest seemed not to have the weight of the lining of the other. It was the work of a moment to slip the substitute band around him and beneath the jersey. This done, Corky—to all intents and purposes—was again as he had been when he had stepped on the scales. He paused at the door to view himself in the badly cracked full-length mirror. Then he ran from the locker room to join the others on the field, face relaxed in a confident grin!

The next night, Coach Everett occasioned

some surprise by gathering up an outfit of football togs, putting it on the scales and announcing its weight.

“This weighing business takes too much time,” he said, by way of explanation, “After this, don’t *wait* to weigh! Get dressed and weigh on your way out to the field. Subtract seven pounds from whatever total you get and you’ll have your weight near enough!

Corky, listening to these instructions, suppressed with difficulty a shout of joy.

Princeton High, under the tutelage of Coach Everett, had put excellent football teams on the gridiron for the past four years. But in those four seasons there had been one eleven that Princeton could not defeat. True, Princeton had played two smashing tie games with this stanch opponent—and had taken what crumb of consolation there was to having held the mighty Clarksburg even. Upon the two other occasions, Clarksburg had battered Princeton into submission by scores of 12 to 0 and 14 to 3. High time Princeton was reversing the process!

The student body rejoiced at the news that Corky Hobbs had made the squad. There was

greater rejoicing as the season advanced and the midget candidate for quarterback distinguished himself by spectacular play in scrimmage. Corky was a streak and a wildcat combined. He threw himself into action with complete physical abandon. On defense, opposing interference and men with the ball came to respect the presence of Corky's slender figure as an obstacle to further progress. Spectators wondered at the ability of one so light to encounter such heavy opposition and emerge none the worse for wear. Corky's vicious tackling became the talk of the school campus while his running of the ends was described as the best seen in many a day. Once give Corky a clear field and his ability to elude tacklers was uncanny.

"There's not enough of that fellow to tackle!" complained Lester Bell, the veteran right end, after being made to look quite foolish in an attempt to nail the "flying sparrow," as team-mates called Corky.

No question about it. The new candidate for the football team was out to prove that beef didn't count so much as was generally supposed.

"Did you ever have anyone hit you any

harder?" asked Seedy Hayes, Princeton's heaviest backfield man, recalling ruefully the times that Corky had dumped him on his breaking through the line. "He never seems to miss a tackle and, oh, boy—how he jolts you! Imagine the coach keeping that bunch of condensed dynamite out of football for two years on account of his weight!"

Coach Everett himself was highly pleased. How could anyone have prophesied that a chap Corky's build would have displayed such promise? It was one thing to have admitted that Corky was fast on his feet and naturally athletic but these two factors need not necessarily have indicated unusual football prowess, especially when so apparently overruled by lack of physical assets.

"He's a freak!" decided the coach, after elevating Corky to the position of varsity quarterback in the third game of the season. "A freak who gets every last ounce out of the pounds he carries! If every player used his weight to such advantage there'd be no stopping 'em, or the team!"

Thus, at mid-season, Corky—the mouse of the eleven—became the lion of the campus.

There was a secret, however, which Corky

guarded well. He developed the reputation of being about the last man dressed and the last man weighed in. He was, by the same token, usually the last to appear on the field. But few, if any, beyond realizing this casual manner of Corky's thought anything of it. And none had ever chanced to witness the quick sleight-of-hand performance which took place every evening between the few minutes of weighing in and the time of appearing on the field. This bit of artful deception took place ordinarily in the vicinity of Corky's locker after all team-mates had gone out. On two occasions Corky had been forced to accompany lingering fellow players to the field and had then invented an excuse to return to the locker room for a moment. Once he had purposely broken a shoe lace; the other time he had left his headgear behind. This, the price of holding his weight up to one hundred forty-eight pounds and yet not carrying the extra twenty-odd pounds on the field of battle!

With every game out of the way but the big contest with Clarksburg, the student body of Princeton High suddenly awoke to the realization that their eleven was confronted with the golden opportunity of going through its first

undefeated season! Largely due to the quick-witted leadership of midget Quarterback Hobbs, the Princeton backfield of Ellis, Clint and Hayes had torn through all opposition. Only Clarksburg, the Gibraltar on which Princeton hopes had been dashed before, stood between the finest team the school had ever boasted and an unblemished season's record.

The last night of scrimmage before the all-important Clarksburg battle, Coach Everett paid especial attention to the physical condition of his players. He personally checked up on their weights.

"Well, Corky," said the coach, as the diminutive quarterback stepped on the scales, "You're down to one-forty-two. Lost six pounds since the season began. Subtracting seven puts you at one thirty-five. Just think where you'd have been if you'd only weighed one hundred fifteen to start as you did last season!"

Corky nodded, his face flushing. He didn't exactly like the searching look that the coach gave him . . . or was this just his imagination? This business of keeping up a grand deception about one's weight wasn't any lead pipe cinch, although some sure enough lead did enter into the equation! How lucky he'd been that no one

had taken a poke at him while he'd been wearing the "lead corset."

But to-day Corky had a premonition that all might not go so well. For one thing, Coach Everett had a number of matters he wanted to talk over. Corky slipped back to his locker and was about to remove the excess weight, replacing it with the usual lightly padded band, when he detected the coach coming toward him.

"There's something inside my shoe that rubs," Corky explained. "I've meant to fix it the last couple nights."

"That so?" said the coach, standing by as the lightest member on the team jerked off the foot covering. "Let me see it!"

Corky handed up the shoe in question and the coach ran practiced fingers inside it.

"I don't feel anything. Where does it get you?"

"The toe next to my big one," made up Corky, lamely.

"Hmm! Must be the way you walk. Maybe a wrinkle in your sock. Certainly—that's it! Look at that sock—smooth out that wrinkle and you'll be all right!"

"Much obliged!" mumbled Corky, doing as instructed. He stamped his shoe back on. No

use trying to get rid of the coach. He'd have to go out on the field with his "lead jacket" on.

Coach Everett desired to try out Clarksburg plays against the varsity. The loyal scrubs were given the plays and sent charging into the first team line. Hooley, a promising member of the scrub backfield, was used to impersonate Tait, Clarksburg's great triple-threat man. And Hooley, aided by several cleverly executed trick plays, was reeling off some good gains.

"Stop that baby!" yelled the coach. "Is that the way Tait is going to go through you? What's the matter, Corky? You've let him slip past you twice!"

The whole Princeton High backfield stiffened. It was the scrubs' ball on the varsity's twenty-yard line. Hooley, elated at the manner in which he had been tearing through the first team, tossed aside his headgear and prepared for a final onslaught which he hoped would place the pigskin over the line for a touchdown. It was seldom that the scrub's enjoyed a taste of victory. The way the Clarksburg plays were working, here was a glorious opportunity! . . .

The ball came to Hooley. Another deceptive formation. The scrubs tricked the regulars on a shift to the left and Hooley, with only a one-man interference, swept around the right end. It looked for a moment as though he had a clear field to the goal line but Sly Ellis, cutting in, threw himself at the interference in an effort to reach the man with the ball. Corky, spurred by the coach's reprimand, was not far behind. As Ellis hit the interference, Hooley—under full steam—side-stepped. He was running, head down, knees working like pistons. Corky, seeing that Hooley was swinging inside his interference, stopped short in his tracks. Both runner and would-be tackle dodged the same way. The “flying sparrow” had no time for a tackle. He had only time to reach out his arms and the next instant Hooley had plowed into him, Hooley's head striking Corky with great force on the chest. The collision brought both to earth where they lay for a moment, stunned. Corky had the wind knocked from him while Hooley dazedly rubbed his head.

“Whew!” he gasped, as team-mates ran up.
“What did I hit—a concrete post?”

Seedy Hayes laughed.

“No—only Corky!”

Hooley got to his feet, rubbing his scalp tenderly.

“That guy’s ribs are like iron! Feel the lump on my head, will you?”

Seedy did.

“Good night!” he remarked, with a curious glance at Corky.

“Good night yourself!” retorted Corky, with an effort to divert attention. “His *head* isn’t any egg shell! Feels like *I’ve* got a busted rib!”

“Well, that makes me feel better!” replied Hooley. “I was beginning to think you were a whippet variety of human tank!”

Corky played the scrimmage period out. Then, the moment time was called, he raced to the clubhouse and exchanged his armor-like vest for the softly padded one. As he hurried back on the field he passed a group of student spectators.

“There goes the toughest boy on the team!” said one.

“Gave Hooley a headache ‘just running into him!” said another.

“And you simply can’t hurt him!” voiced a third. “Look how he’s played all year! . . .”

Corky could not restrain a grin. It was really uncanny the way things had been breaking for him. Here, when he'd almost had his secret discovered, the enforced wearing of the "lead vest" had given him more prestige than ever! And the chances were there'd be no more weighings before the big game with Clarksburg . . . which would mean that he'd have played the whole season on a ruse!

"I suppose the coach'll try to tell me, one of these days," ruminated Corky, "that I'd never have been able to play quarterback position without my twenty extra pounds!"

The following evening was to be devoted to a light running through of signals. The next day was Friday with no workout at all and Saturday, the 19th of November, brought the long anticipated clash with Clarksburg on Princeton High field. Reports from Clarksburg indicated a crowd of twelve hundred coming to root for the "greatest team in Clarksburg history."

"Got nothing on us *there!*" Princeton supporters answered. "*We've* the greatest team in history, too!"

Corky entered the clubhouse on the last night

of practice with a feeling of great reassurance and light-heartedness. It had been a hard season for him, even though a joyous one. He joined in the songs team-mates were singing as he got out the key to his locker.

Princeton High, Dear Princeton High,
We've going to leave you bye and bye—
Oh, Princeton High, Dear . . .

The dickens! What had become of his—his “lead vest”? It must be there somewhere! No, sir! It wasn't! It was gone! Someone had taken it!

The discovery took all the “song” out of Corky. He glanced cautiously about. Chances were some of the fellows had gotten “wise” . . . and had taken the vest to have some fun with him. Oh, well—why should *he* care now? He probably wouldn't have need for the vest again. Of course, he'd rather the coach didn't know until after the Clarksburg game. Couldn't exactly tell what the coach might do under the circumstances.

Seedy Hayes, Sly Ellis and Hugh Clint—backfield veterans—were making merry near him. Likely as not one of them had . . . or

. . . or maybe it had been Hooley! Shucks, there was no use trying to figure! Corky did not have to put on his duplicate vest, for he wore it at all times, with the exception of the times he had exchanged it for the heavier one—as the vest had given him the filled out appearance necessary to go with the increased avoirdupois.

“Come on, Corky, old hard chest!” called Seedy, eying the quarterback. “*Can* that far-off look! Can’t you remember those new signals?”

Corky snapped his locky door shut, self-consciously. Seedy took him by the arm.

“Worrying about old Clarksburg, eh? You can’t afford to worry, brother. You’re thin enough as it is!”

Corky started, giving Seedy a suspicious glance. Sly Ellis and Hugh Clint came alongside and all, as though by common consent, shuffled toward the door. As they passed the scales, Sly Ellis stepped on playfully.

“This thing’s got me down!” he announced. “Force of habit, I guess. I can’t pass the darn thing any more without giving the indicator a ride!”

As Sly stepped off, Hugh stepped on.

“Ha! You’ve got me *in* three pounds!”

“Get off and let papa weigh the baby!” kidded Seedy Hayes, putting arms around the unsuspecting Corky and lifting him off his feet.

Now Corky was certain these fellows were in the “know.”

“Nix!” he pleaded. “Want to get me in bad? Put me down! Here comes the coach!”

“*In bad?*” laughed Seedy, tightening his grasp on Corky and setting him down on the scales. “How’s this going to get you in bad?”

Coach Everett, coming through, stopped to look on. Corky, surrounded by grinning teammates, had no recourse. The hand of the scales began its tell-tale wavering . . . went up up . . . then back . . . back . . . back . . . until mouths opened in astonishment.

“Holy smoke!” gasped Seedy, finally. “Something’s gone wrong with the scales. Look! Corky only weighs one hundred twenty-three! That’s not more’n one hundred sixteen stripped . . . ! Am I seeing right or am I dizzy?”

Corky stepped down off the scales, crest-fallen. It was all up now. He expected any moment to receive a reprimand from the coach. Instead he was surprised to hear the coach say,

in a matter-of-fact voice, "I've thought for some time those scales were off."

Sly and Hugh looked at one another incredulously.

"But they weighed *us* all right!" Sly protested. "Just a second ago!"

"Then perhaps *you fellows* were the ones that were *off*!" suggested the coach, amid laughter. "Get out on the field, the bunch of you!"

And once more Corky emerged from a tight situation with the feeling that no one actually knew . . . unless somebody was kidding him! Why, he'd actually sold the coach so thoroughly on his increased weight that the coach had blamed the scales! And yet—somebody *must* be kidding him. The somebody who had his vest!

On the way out to the field, Corky decided that he would sound out Seedy.

"Say, Seed," he approached, in an undertone. "You got something of mine?"

Seedy looked at Corky queerly .

"No—what would I be doing with anything of yours?"

"Well—do you *know* of anyone who's got

something of mine?" ventured Corky, watching Seedy's face closely.

"What the dence are you talking about?" demanded Seedy, stopping short.

"Nothing!" snapped Corky, running past the apparently perplexed fullback.

Saturday provided a perfect football afternoon for the Clarksburg-Princeton encounter . . . clear, crisp weather. And both schools, as well as the towns interested, provided a perfectly noisy football crowd. The rival teams then proceeded to stir into these ingredients a brand of competition seldom seen. At the end of the third quarter Clarksburg was leading by virtue of one field goal—a perfect boot from the thirty-yard line by their triple-threat man, Tait, whom the Princeton eleven had successfully stopped in his efforts as a ball carrier. As the game wore along, the three slender points, thus gained, began to look bigger and bigger. Both teams had put up heroic defenses of their goal line, with Clarksburg showing a shade the more of strength due to an advantage in weight, from end to end. But weight had not told the only story in the progress of the game.

Thus far the smallest individual on the field had contributed the most outstanding work. The Princeton High quarterback had been a flaming torch, keeping his team-mates at frenzied fighting pitch throughout. Time and again he had brought the stands to their feet by his marvelous tackling on secondary defense when it had seemed as though Clarksburg backfield men were through for big gains . . . and possible touchdowns. His short, slender figure was now mud-begrimed, with his jersey in tatters, and one trouser leg ripped open . . . mute evidence that he had been in the heart of every play. The sympathy and admiration of the crowd was his. Regardless of how the game went, the instant play centered about the "flying sparrow," everybody impulsively wished him well.

"That boy's a wonder!" complimented many. "The best player on the field!"

Clarksburg, organizing for a last great attempt to put the ball over Princeton's goal line, sensed a weary weakening of their opponents' defense. Slowly but steadily, in that last desperate quarter, Princeton began giving ground. Try as he would, Corky could not arouse his soldier linesmen to greater effort.

They were even now calling upon every bit of their reserve and finding it not quite enough.

“Hold ’em, Princeton!” begged the stands, reluctant to surrender hope of victory and a first undefeated season. “Beat Clarksburg!”

But the cry, “Beat Clarksburg!” lashed upon eardrums as a whip against a tired horse which, through long and strenuous plodding, had grown unresponsive. Princeton could feel a stronger sting now . . . the memory sting of other defeats suffered at the mauling hands of Clarksburg. And Tait, the visitors’ star back, began to get free for sweeping runs.

It was on one of Tait’s vicious plunges that the tide suddenly changed. Clarksburg had carried the oval well down into Princeton territory. There were four minutes of the game left. Could she smash across in that time?

“Give the ball to Tait!” her rooters had beseeched.

And Tait had plunged with the ball . . . plunged through a great hole driven in the Princeton line . . . plunged into the open field with the enemy’s goal but ten yards away. There were no opposing hands within reach of him . . . at least, so it seemed. Yet, out of the

nowhere into the immediate proximity a little sandy-haired thunderbolt projected itself. The impact of the small body as it struck the larger one could be heard above the hysterical roar of the crowd. Tait went down on the five-yard line as though his legs had been shot from under him with a cannon ball. But more than that . . . the tackle had been so clean cut and so hard that the ball was jolted loose from Tait's grasp, bounding off to the side. And Sly Ellis, following madly after the streak left by the "flying sparrow," scooped the pigskin up, turning his face resolutely toward the distant Clarksburg goal. This is how the tide suddenly changed . . . as suddenly and unexpectedly as though a ponderous river had reversed its course and started back upon itself!

White-lipped interference formed for Sly. Princeton linesmen who had scarcely been able to drag themselves back into position following each play, now found new strength to propel heavy legs. On and on lunged the man with the ball as his comrades cleared the way by striking Clarksburg tacklers down like tenpins. Princeton rooters roared encouragement.

"Come on, Sly! Come on! *Come on!*"

At Clarksburg's twenty-yard line, one of her

fleet-footed ends overtook the man in whom Princeton fans had placed their last mad hope for victory. Sly went down on a tackle from the side after having carried the ball from his own five-yard line for a magnificent open-field run of seventy-five yards!

A minute and ten seconds left to play! Clarksburg came to life after its darkest moment. The game was as good as over. One more play would end it and Princeton was still twenty yards away. Clarksburg's three points would suffice. But such a contest as this had been!

Out on the field Princeton team-mates went into the familiar huddle. Sly and Corky were hysterically embraced.

"What'll we do, gang?" asked Corky. "A place kick would tie!"

"Kick formation!" seconded Seedy. "But no place kick! It's win or lose, this time! No tie!"

"Signals!" called Corky as the linesmen fell into position.

Clarksburg, seeing the formation, jumped at once to an obvious and natural conclusion.

"Block that kick!" screamed their rooters. Of course, Princeton would try for a tie

score. She would be glad enough to divide honors and call it a day after such a terrific struggle.

As Corky knelt to smooth a place for the up-ending of the ball, Seedy shouted in his ear:

“Fake a pass after I fake the kick . . . but don’t chance it! Follow my interference!”

The “flying sparrow” looked up and grinned.

“The cool little cucumber!” thought the coach, nervously biting his finger nails.

The ball snapped back. A wavering Princeton line held. Corky caught the pigskin and touched it to the ground as Fullback Seedy Hayes came swinging toward it. His leg went through the kicking motion but the toe connected only with thin air. The small, crouched figure suddenly straightened and, holding the ball at arm’s length, gave one quick glance to determine if a player were free to receive it. Clarksburg shrilled a new warning as the Princeton quarterback shot off on a wide run, picking up Seedy Hayes and Lester Bell, his own right end, as interference.

It was difficult for the eye to follow just what happened after that. Clarksburg, badly disorganized from the sheer audacity of the play,

made a frantic effort to lay hands on the bounding midget. Lester Bell was struck down early, bringing two Clarksburg tacklers with him on the fifteen-yard line. Then Seedy Hayes contributed his last bit of assistance by warding off a certain tackle as Corky veered dangerously near the side lines on his dash toward the goal.

Out on his own, Corky was hemmed in by two wide-eyed Clarksburg men. He dodged one but the other, though missing the tackle, managed to catch hold of Corky's tattered jersey. For a moment it seemed as though the "flying sparrow" was doomed. He strained against the pull of the prostrate tackler who grimly retained his grip. Then Princeton shrieked with joy as Corky and the jersey were suddenly seen to part company. The shrieks soon changed to gasps of wonderment as Corky was seen to be parting with something else . . . a white, fluffy something which bulged out from a wide, flapping corset-like affair at his mid-section and dotted the field behind him as he ran!

Corky alone knew what the white, fluffy substance was. But he gave little thought to it now as he ran, for the Clarksburg goal was

only ten yards away . . . the Clarksburg goal . . . a touchdown . . . and victory! Yet it is said, "There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and lip." In this case, there were several slips 'twixt the chest and the knees. Corky's improvised vest, loosened by the strain placed upon it through Corky's wrenching free from the hold on his jersey—began to jostle down . . . first to his thighs . . . then down . . . down . . . down . . . finally catching at his knees . . . entangling his legs . . . and—five yards from the goal—tripping him up! Corky fell heavily, rolled over, struggled to his feet and fell again. It was as though he were trying to run with his feet in a gunny sack.

Seeing Corky's very peculiar predicament, Clarksburg tacklers, yards away, gained heart and renewed the chase. With the game hanging in the balance, the "flying sparrow" once more regained his feet, having kept in motion all the while. This time, instead of trying to run, he took to jumping, giving a furtive glance over his shoulder at eager-armed tacklers. If the situation had not been so serious it could easily have been riotously funny. But no one was inspired to laugh now. The field was a riot of sound and hysterical yells.

Leaping frantically, kangaroo fashion, the ball pressed desperately to him, Corky neared the Clarksburg goal, foot by foot. His vest was now hugging his legs between the knees and the ankles. Behind him, for a distance of seven yards, there lay a dotted streak of white. Corky was gaining ground slowly and losing weight fast.

A foot from the goal, Clarksburg tacklers reached him, but in trying to drag him down from behind they gave the added impetus needed to put him over the line. After that there remains nothing of the game to report but the maddest sort of delirium and an inconsequential missing of the point after touch-down by Seedy Hayes.

In the clubhouse, after having been ridden twice around the field on many shoulders, a repentent young man sought out the coach.

"Gee!" said Corky, "I'd never have forgiven myself if I'd failed to make that touch-down after deceiving you all season about my weight."

"Deceiving me?" replied the coach. "Who said you were deceiving me? What do you suppose I permitted the team to weigh in 'dressed' for?"

Corky's mouth opened and a sheepish look came over his face. Fellow players laughed.

"Cheer up, Cork, you had *us* fooled!" confessed Seedy.

"When I saw how badly you wanted to play, I decided to give you a chance regardless," continued the coach, eyes twinkling. "But I warned you, young man! Remember—I always said if a fellow as light as you played football—'you'd get the *stuffing* knocked out of you'!"

Corky, grinning broadly, picked a bit of cotton batting from his shirt front and blew it impishly at the coach.

In retaliation the coach reached behind him and held forth a familiar looking something.

"By the way, Corky," he added. "Here's your other vest. I've been saving it for you. . . . There's a bare possibility you may have to use it again to get on the football squad at college!"

FOR ALL HE WAS WORTH

DONALD SELDON had never been known to go through with anything that he started.

“He’s a good fellow but he can’t be depended on,” many said of him.

This reputation followed Donald to Tilford College. Possessing a roving, restless temperament—he would plunge into an activity only to abandon it the moment it became arduous or commonplace. Nothing held his interest for long.

The hopes of the students were aroused at Donald’s showing in football. He had gotten out for the team and had quickly demonstrated that he had the makings of a great kicker. Tilford needed a player with this ability. If Donald’s good work continued, it was thought that he could add a strength to the backfield which would make the team a real contender for the Little Five Championship.

Perhaps no one was more interested in Tilford’s prospects than little Jimmy Brock.

Everybody knew Jimmy. He was the boy with the shriveled up left leg who lived in the old-fashioned house just a block off the campus. He used to hang on the picket fence and greet the students as they passed. But now he had grown in their affections until folks referred to him as the college mascot. He was a familiar sight at all athletic contests and was carried at the head of triumphal processions marking Tilford victories . . . his arm entwined about the necks of sturdy Tilford men . . . his useless leg dangling carelessly . . . a happy smile lighting his face.

Jimmy would always have to get his thrills second-handed. There was something pathetically wistful about the way he idolized Tilford athletes. He viewed their exploits with a courageous resignation. No matter how much he might desire to emulate their feats in baseball, football or track, he was destined ever to remain on the side lines. Sometimes Jimmy would almost forget the twisted leg as he imagined himself in the shoes of some Tilford hero.

The afternoon that he saw Donald Seldon get off forty and fifty-yard kicks in football practice he decided that, for this season at least, he should like to pose to himself as that player.

From that moment on, every play that Donald made was Jimmy's play. When he ran with the ball, Jimmy ran with it; when he tackled a man, Jimmy tackled too; and when he kicked the ball . . . Jimmy stood on two good legs and booted it! Through Donald, Jimmy was made whole again.

That is why it hurt so much the day that he noted the change. It was the last practice session before the opening game and Coach Williams was putting his men through a light scrimmage. Student onlookers watched the play for a time, then glanced at one another in disappointment.

"Might have known Seldon's playing was too good to last!"

"I've felt it coming. That fellow tires of everything . . . and when he does . . . it's all off!"

Something indeed was wrong with Donald. He seemed suddenly, and for no aparent reason, to have lost all interest in football. He played in a listless manner; his kicks lacked power and distance; his running with the ball was slow, pepless.

Coach Williams boomed at him from the side lines.

“What’s the matter, Seldon? Get in there and play the game. You’re hitting that line like a sofa pillow!”

Jimmy felt the reprimand of the coach cutting into him. He wondered if Donald felt it too. He clenched his fists and looked out at the player of his adoption tensely. This time they would show the coach a few things! There was nothing the matter.

The first and second teams were lining up to resume play. Donald, in the varsity fullback position, was holding his hands out for the ball. The second team had been pushed back in the shadow of their goal posts and it was obviously up to Donald to carry the ball across.

Jimmy squirmed uneasily as the ball snapped back. He somehow sensed, against his will, that the change had come to stay; that Donald had been unmoved by the coach’s words; that he had lost the drive which had animated him and no longer cared to give what was in him to give.

Donald was slow in getting away with the ball. The varsity line held . . . even opened up a hole . . . but before the fullback could go through, a second team end came tearing in and tackled him for a four-yard loss.

Coach Williams took Donald from the game.

Jimmy stood by the player of his choice in the days that followed. He couldn't be resentful without being resentful at himself. He had built up a strange sort of loyalty for Donald . . . as strong, of its kind, as his loyalty for the team. He watched Tilford College win the opening game of the season by a top-heavy score. But though he rejoiced at the expected victory, there was a lump in his throat. Donald had not played.

Coach Williams, thinking to bring Seldon to his senses, had made an eleventh-hour change, keeping the player in whom he had hoped to rely, on the side lines. Perhaps next week, smarting under this treatment, the promising kicker would return to form.

But Coach Williams guessed wrong. He was dealing with a temperament he had never encountered before. There was a certain quiet stubbornness about Donald which defied approach. And the very fact that others appeared so much concerned over the way he was playing, served to aggravate rather than relieve the mood into which he had fallen.

Reluctantly, the coach put Seldon back into

the position of a varsity substitute and moved Abbot, a player of consistent ability, into the fullback berth.

Time sped along toward the date of the season's big game with Delmont—a game which would decide the championship of the Little Five Intercollegiate League. There was much discussion as to Tilford's chances and considerable feeling over Donald Seldon's athletic indifference.

Every sort of procedure had been tried to arouse Seldon to the best that was in him. Students craftily appealed to his college spirit, but found Donald immune to stirring sentiment. Others had attempted to make him mad by pointed kidding and, failing in this, had sought to shame him—all to no avail. Upon all of these obvious efforts Donald turned an amused smile—like the look of one who unconcernedly gazes at a hypnotist. He just would not be forced, cajoled, pushed, kidded or shamed into doing anything other than he chose to do.

One late afternoon, as he left the field following the last practice session before the all-important game with Delmont, Donald heard a shrill-piped voice call his name. He turned to see the college mascot hobbling toward him.

"Hello, kid! What's up?"

The boy with the useless leg dragged himself to Donald's side. There was a look in his eyes . . . a look which caused the varsity substitute to pause, wonderingly.

"Do you mind . . . walkin' slow . . . so's I can keep up to you?"

It was Donald's first direct run-in with Jimmy. He placed an arm about the lad's shoulders, good-naturedly.

"No . . . sure not!" as he adjusted his steps to Jimmy's faltering ones. "How's the boy?" in an effort to be friendly.

"I—I'm all right, thank you . . ."

They walked slowly toward the field house, an awkward silence between them.

Then the shrill-piped voice again, hesitant . . . tremulous . . .

"Mr. Seldon? . . ."

"Yes?" curiously.

"Do you 'spose . . . if you get a chance to play against Delmont . . . you could play just a little harder . . . like you did . . . back there . . . at the start?"

Donald stopped in his tracks and looked down at Jimmy questioningly. He was mindful of the pressure that had been brought to bear

on him. Was this some newly devised method of approach . . . a subtle attempt to reach him and to . . . ?

“What is this, kid? A put-up job?”

Tears welled in the eyes of the boy with the shriveled up leg. He bit his lips. It was a struggling moment before he could answer.

“I . . . I’ve been playing I was you, sir . . . all year . . . and I . . . I didn’t play like I . . . like I thought I was going to. . . .” The voice trailed off into a choked sob.

Donald felt a strange something grip him. He kicked a cleated shoe in the sod and looked down at the twisted foot near his. And then—the sudden pathetic irony of it! He saw the vision of his other self in Jimmy . . . a crippled self that had somehow taken hold of him and prevented his doing his best . . . had smothered his real incentive . . . had clung to him all his life, gaining possession just when it appeared as though he were going to amount to something . . . a self to which he had become shackled, causing him to follow the path of least resistance.

There was a new determination in Donald’s face as he leaned over and slapped Jimmy on the back.

"Brace up, kid. If you get another chance, you're going to play better than you ever did before!"

A great and enthusiastic crowd filled the stands at Tilford the day of the game. The Delmont rooters, two thousand strong, were sure of victory. The Delmont team outweighed Tilford eight pounds to the man. It expected to crush and subdue its opponent by the sheer driving force of weight. The visitors had not been scored upon all season. Against such a rival Tilford was pitting a fast, shifty team.

In the first few minutes of play Tilford electrified the throng by an unexpected piece of football. Delmont had kicked off and it was Tilford's ball on its eighteen-yard line. Realizing, perhaps, the odds under which it was battling, Tilford opened up at once a baffling series of forward passes. Coming at this early stage of the game, Delmont was quite unprepared and found—much to its consternation—that Tilford was enjoying a first down on its five-yard line! Not to be denied the spoils of this spectacular advance, the Tilford backfield drove around the Delmont ends until the ball was pushed over for a touchdown.

Furious at having been scored on, Delmont took the next kick-off and started on a line-hammering march toward the Tilford goal. But the lighter Tilford team was throwing every ounce of strength on the defense, contesting every foot of the way in an effort to hold the advantage gained. The ball was carried well into Tilford territory before Delmont was finally held for downs.

Abbot, Tilford fullback, immediately punted to put the ball out of danger but his punt carried high and fell within thirty yards. Again the Delmont steam roller advanced, nearer this time. And again Tilford flung back the foe, now trying to take the offense. But Delmont was putting up a savage defense and Tilford was forced to kick. The game resolved into a punting duel with Delmont gaining ground on every exchange of kicks. It was evident to on-lookers that the battering Delmont attack was gradually wearing down the heroic Tilford line. And with the poor support it was getting from its kicker—the game must soon become a rout.

On the side lines crouched an impatient substitute. He groaned every time the well-meaning Abbot toed the ball. Abbot was giving his

best but it was not good enough. Beside the substitute knelt the college mascot, his eyes burning with excitement.

The half was almost over and still the Tilford team had fought off the smashing onslaught. Delmont had not anticipated such stubborn opposition. But Tilford could not hold out much longer. It was Delmont's third down on Tilford's fifteen-yard line and one yard to go.

Coach Williams paced nervously up and down. His charges had battled desperately to keep their touchdown lead. It was doubtful if Tilford would be able to score again. The team had taken Delmont by surprise . . . by the utter audacity of opening the game with a forward passing attack. The boys realized that their hopes of winning depended largely upon holding . . . holding in the face of everything that Delmont had to offer.

The coach felt a hand on his arm.

"Please, sir . . . let me go in!"

There was a look in Seldon's eyes that the coach had not seen all season. 'He hesitated.

A great roar went up from the stands. Tilford had broken through and thrown Delmont for a loss. The ball was going over. The Del-

mont team, checked once more in its determined advance, lined up on the defensive, eager to block the punt.

Jimmy cried with joy as he saw the coach wave Donald to go in. He watched the substitute report to the referee, saw him pat Abbot on the back, saw him take his position, saw the ball come whirling back, saw a good right leg go flashing up, saw the ball leave the foot in a spiral arch and saw the Delmont fullback fall on it, fifty yards from Tilford's goal line.

Such a cheer as went up! Strengthened by the presence of the man who could not be depended on, Tilford again set itself to the task of holding Delmont.

The half ended, Tilford 6; Delmont 0.

It is history now, how—in the second half—the Delmont team came out on the field with the frenzy of tigers. It is history, written indelibly in the memory of everyone who saw that game—how time and again the Tilford line held in the shadow of its goal posts and how, smiling confidently, a fellow by the name of Donald Seldon booted the ball far down the field, reducing Delmont's offensive efforts to naught.

It was not until the last five minutes of the game that the visiting team was able to get within close scoring distance. Tilford had made a tremendous bid for the championship, exhausting every resource . . . against a team admittedly stronger. Delmont needed a touchdown to tie and the point after touchdown to win, as Tilford had failed in this.

On the three-yard line and first down!

A hush came over the spectators. Even Delmont rooters, admiring Tilford's inspired stand, sensed a feeling of compunction that their team should snatch the glory at the very last.

"Hold 'em, Tilford!" came a plea . . . one hopeful voice sounding frail and alone against the stillness.

The substitute fullback stood just behind the goal line, hoarsely exhorting his team-mates.

The Delmont line charged and broke through over the Tilford goal. But it was a Tilford player who shot through the opening and hit the man with the ball. The pigskin flashed in the air. A fumble! Then a confused mass of legs and arms.

When the bottom of the pile was reached the Tilford stands almost went hysterical with joy.

The substitute lay face down with the ball in his arms . . . six inches in front of the goal line!

But the danger was not over.

Jimmy, heart pounding, saw Donald lifted to his feet; saw the substitute moaning with pain; saw the players put him down again and look toward the side lines, worriedly.

“Water!”

With the cry came a sight which strangely set the blood tingling. Hopping across the field with a shriveled up leg swinging and scraping the roughened ground—a pail in one hand sloshing water violently—the college mascot stumbled and lurched. Behind him chased the regular water boy. The Tilford stands gave vent to a mighty cheer. Jimmy seemed not to notice but the regular water boy stopped, waved his hand at the cheering throng and retreated to the side lines.

The substitute was suffering intense pain. His hands clasped a badly wrenched right knee. Team-mates looked down at him in despair. If ever his services were needed they were needed now.

“I—I’m all in. I guess they’d better take me out!”

As Donald spoke he was conscious of a commotion . . . of someone pushing through . . . of the clink of a cup in a pail of water. He raised his head.

"Hello, kid! What you doing here?"

The college mascot fell on his knees and raised a cup to the substitute's lips. His eyes took in the hurt; his face sobered.

"Gee! Your right leg!" as he noticed the rapidly swelling knee joint. "I wisht you could use mine. . . ."

The substitute glanced at Jimmy's good right leg. His crippled self again . . . and yet Jimmy was making the most of what he had.

"Off the field, son!" snapped the referee.

"Bandages!" called the substitute.

With his knee tightly bound, and wincing every step he took, Donald hobbled back five yards behind his own goal line. The stands held their breath as they saw that he was going to attempt a kick in this condition. Delmont, realizing that its biggest opportunity was at hand, dug its toes into the sod and prepared to break through the shattered line . . . to block the kick . . . and to grab the touchdown which this player's toe had thus far thwarted.

The Tilford line parted like a sieve as the

ball snapped back. The pass was a little high and the substitute made a limping jump for it. A Delmont linesman loomed up before him. He side-stepped, shifted his weight to his left foot, the bandaged knee swung up with all the force of old. There was the hollow plunk of the ball as it left the kicker's toe, just grazing the face of the Delmont linesman and turning end over end, carried to the Tilford forty-yard line!

It mattered not that they carried the substitute off the field now. His work was done. He had seen it through. And there was only a minute left to play.

At the victory celebration that night Donald Seldon told the college how a boy, with a shriveled up leg, played "like he thought he was going to."

THE BETTER HALF

JERRY CAMPBELL had no more expected to be chosen as left half on the Sadler Prep football team than he had expected to grow a beard. He had merely gone out for the team in order to get in the way of the fellows who could play so as to give them practice. Consequently, the news of his selection over Carl Winstrom came as a stunning surprise.

The whole school was surprised, for that matter. Carl Winstrom, by his own admission, was a better half than Jerry. In fact, those who had watched him in practice games had prophesied that he would develop into one of Sadler Prep's greatest open-field runners. To have Carl relegated to the position of a substitute back on the first team seemed a grievous oversight bordering upon actual injustice.

Carl felt the blow keenly for he had been as certain of occupying the left half position as he had been sure of devouring waffles and syrup

each morning for breakfast. In his exalted opinion, the Sadler Prep football team could no more get along without his services than a train could run without a locomotive. And there were plenty of student sympathizers who felt the same way about it!

Coach Behler's judgment had never before been questioned. But now the school walls echoed with whispered mutterings of, "What do you know about that?" and "Winstrom's got it all over Campbell—wonder what the coach was thinking of!"

With all these mutterings, it was natural that Jerry should run into waves from the tide of comment. He was painfully conscious of what was being said about him. And what was more, he absolutely agreed with it. He honestly felt that Carl was the better half. The affair began to get on his nerves. He finally went to Coach Behler.

"I—if you please, sir—didn't you make a mistake?"

"A mistake?"

"Yes, sir—picking me for left half—instead of Carl?"

The coach looked at Jerry sharply.

“What makes you think that—picking you—was a mistake?”

Jerry met Coach Behler’s eyes frankly.

“Because . . . Carl’s a better player than I am!”

The coach laid a hand upon Jerry’s shoulder. His reply was quiet but pointed.

“Unfortunately a better player is not always of the greatest value to a team.”

There was a moment of silence as Jerry tried to puzzle out the statement.

“I—I can’t say that I understand, sir.”

The coach smiled, warmly.

“And I can’t explain just now, Jerry . . . but don’t let what others are saying affect you. I’m running this team. If you hadn’t earned your position, you wouldn’t have gotten it.”

Jerry left Coach Behler, more unsettled than ever. The coach himself had indicated that he considered Carl a better player. Then, why on earth wasn’t Carl selected?

Injured pride can cause a lot of trouble. The more Carl thought about the fellow who had beaten him out for a place on the team, the more furious he became. Carl expressed his feelings openly. He showed his disposition in

practice by sulking and by ignoring Jerry. He was even responsible for the vicious rumor that Coach Behler was playing favorites.

In the game with Bentley High, after Jerry had failed to gain when called upon to take the ball around the ends, the Sadler cheering section began to yell: "We want Winstrom! We want Winstrom!"

Carl, sitting on the side lines, looked toward Coach Behler questioningly. Sadler was leading by a safe margin. Would the coach accede to popular demand? . . . He would. The coach waved for Carl to go in.

Nerves tingling, the fellow who knew he was the better half, raced on the field and reported to the referee. The game was three quarters over. Another play made it Sadler's third down on her own thirty-five-yard line. Carl whispered to O'Neill, quarterback. O'Neill nodded his head.

Signals . . . a rapid succession of numbers and the ball snapped back to Carl. He dashed around left end, close behind his interference. Then, seeing what looked to be an opening, he cut well inside this interference, out on his own. The Sadler stands broke into a great cheer as they saw Carl running free. His interference,

swinging to the side of the field, put every would-be tackler out of the way. It was the natural supposition of the players comprising this advance guard that the man with the ball was following them. They were amazed, a moment later, to discern him dodging swiftly through Bentley's secondary defense—twenty yards away—and deftly evading all opponents. Amid the excited roar of the crowd, Carl tore over white mark after white mark until he circled behind the Bentley goal posts and touched the ball triumphantly to the ground.

There! Guess that would hold the coach for a while! A sixty-five-yard run for touchdown the first time he'd been called on to carry the ball! Guess that proved to those who thought he should have been chosen over Jerry Campbell that their faith in him was justified! Guess maybe that sensational run hadn't made the coach's choice look bad by overwhelming comparison!

"What's the matter with Winstrom!" howled the Sadler rooters defiantly.

Coach Behler shook his head sadly at the cheers.

When the game was over and Carl, the center of an enthusiastic group of admirers,

pushed into the locker room, Coach Behler called him aside.

"Carl, why didn't you follow your interference?" he asked.

Carl glared.

"I didn't have to . . . I saw a good opening."

"One chance in a thousand!"

"Oh, I don't know . . . I made a touchdown." Carl's manner was cocky and confident.

"Some day you are going to learn that football is not a one-man game," said the coach, meaningly. "That's all!"

Carl took a shower and changed clothes, raging inwardly. Imagine a coach bawling a fellow out for making the star play of the game! Calling him down for not following his interference when he'd made a sixty-five-yard run! Oh, the coach had a beautiful grudge against him, all right. The better he played the less the coach thought of him.

Carl bumped into Jerry on the way out. He started to pass without speaking.

"Fine work!" complimented Jerry, sincerely.

"Fine work, bah!"

‘ The longest run on Sadler field this year!’” Jerry persisted. “I knew, when you got the chance, you would show ’em what you could do!”

Carl was in no mood to receive advances from anyone, especially Jerry.

“Chance!” he exclaimed, cuttingly, “Chance! What good does a chance do you when the coach plays favorites? Did you get a bawling out for the way you played to-day?”

“N-no . . .” Jerry answered, wonderingly.

“Well—the coach jumped all over me because I made that touchdown!”

Without waiting to explain, Carl turned his back on the well-meaning Jerry and strode off.

By nightfall all Sadler Prep was buzzing about Coach Behler’s sour grapes over Carl’s good showing. Trust Carl to have broadcast the news far and wide.

The Sadler-Selfridge contest the following Saturday was a walk-away victory for Sadler. It perhaps would have been almost completely devoid of interest were it not for the miserable playing of Jerry Campbell. With Sadler away to a safe lead, its left half committed a costly fumble, which resulted in his team’s being

scored upon for the first time that season. After this blunder, Jerry just seemed to go to pieces entirely. When called on to carry the ball he was often stopped in his tracks and thrown for heavy losses. All through the game, he could be seen looking toward the sides lines as if expecting to have Coach Behler take him out. The Sadler rooters finally shouted, "Give us Winstrom! Give us Winstrom!" but this time, the coach was unmoved. The final score was 34 to 7, thanks to the ground-gaining ability of Ted Smalley and Mack Larrimer, who held the right half and fullback positions. These two veterans were playing their third and last year for Sadler. They had become almost an institution in the Sadler backfield and were counted on to give sturdy performances every game.

Carl was exceptionally jubilant following the sorry showing of Jerry in the Selfridge contest. He felt that this, more than anything else, would compel Coach Behler to give him a real chance . . . the right to start in a game as a regular.

The biggest football clash of the season was only three weeks off. Sadler Prep had started pointing for this battle. The school never con-

sidered its season a success unless topped by a victory over its historic rival, Clinton High. To date, out of eight annual meetings on the gridiron, each eleven had won four victories. This year's conflict would give one team the edge.

The Sadler Banner, school paper, in commenting on the approaching game, had this rather bold statement to make:

"It would appear, from the inexplicably poor work that Jerry Campbell has displayed, both on the offense and defense, that Coach Behler will feel called upon to use Carl Winstrom at left half in the big Clinton battle. Winstrom has had but few opportunities to show his stuff this season but has demonstrated his ability on the occasions sent in. Those who saw his great sixty-five-yard sprint for a touchdown in the Bentley High game are rooting for Carl to be given a chance against the powerful Clinton team."

On the Friday afternoon before the annual contest, it was the custom for the line-ups of the two teams to be posted. A huge crowd of excited Sadler students jammed in front of the gymnasium bulletin board at five p.m. that Friday, eager to learn of those elected to start the most important conflict of the year.

A disappointed groan went up when the list appeared.

“Campbell again!” someone yelled.

“Good-by game!” shouted another.

Carl, standing a few paces apart from the crowd, in the shadow of some trees, listened to the cries of disapproval with great satisfaction. He hoped that the dissension would reach the ears of the coach.

“Can I see you a minute?”

Carl started. He whirled about to be confronted by the fellow who had beaten him out for the team. Jerry’s face was set . . . determined.

“Let’s walk down this side street.”

Carl fell in beside Jerry, wonderingly. When they had slipped away and Jerry was sure no one saw them, he spoke earnestly: “Listen, Carl . . . you’re going to play tomorrow!”

Carl stopped, looked at Jerry and laughed.

“Me? . . . You’re talking through your hat!”

“No, I’m not. I’m going to fix it. I’m going to get sick!”

“You! Sick?” Carl gasped. “What’s the idea?”

"The coach is dead set against you for some reason. I didn't think so . . . at first . . . but he told me himself you were a better player than I. . . ."

"He did?" Carl clutched at Jerry's arm.

"Yes . . . I went to him once . . . about you . . . and the last few games . . . I tried to lay down so he would have to put you in . . . but he caught on . . . and made me stick. Tomorrow I can't lay down. The fellow who plays left half . . . who plays any position . . . has got to do his best or we're beaten! I—I've always known you were a better player than I. It's been mighty hard—in the game—thinking every time I carried the ball what you could have done if you'd been in my place. . . ."

Carl felt a glow of pleasure; his heart pounded at the mere thought of playing.

"Why—why, that's certainly white of you, Jerry. But . . . how're you going to manage it?"

Jerry winked and placed a hand to his head.

"I'm developing a headache now. By morning, I'll be a complication of 'diseases!'"

Carl held out his hand.

"I'm surely grateful to you."

Jerry's face sobered.

“Save your gratitude, Carl. I wouldn’t be doing this if I didn’t honestly believe you’ll be of greater value to the team.”

A mighty shout went up when Sadler Prep took the field against Clinton High to start the biggest game of the year. The outburst was more in recognition of Carl Winstrom’s presence in the line-up than it was for the team as a whole.

“Yea, Winstrom! Yea, Yea, Yea!” howled the stands.

Carl smiled confidently. This was his day of days. He would respond to the ovation by getting away for some sensational runs. All he asked was an open field. Given this, there would be no stopping him. He would be the outstanding star of the game.

Clinton kicked off. It was Sadler’s first down on her fifteen-yard line. Quarterback O’Neill tried Larrimer, fullback, on a line plunge. Good for three yards. Then Smalley, right half, on an end run. Clinton broke up Smalley’s interference and dropped him for a yard loss. Then Larrimer again, trying out Clinton’s line. A bare yard gain. Larrimer

dropped back to kick and sent the ball forty yards down the field.

The first half speedily resolved itself into a defensive battle, both teams playing a careful game, testing each other out and holding about even on exchanges of punts.

Carl, eager, expectant—waited impatiently for his number to be called. It was near the middle of the half before Quarterback O'Neill gave him the ball. Finally, with the ball on Sadler's forty-yard line, Carl got the signal for a dash around left end. He dug his toes into the soft dirt and, clutching the ball with a feeling of fierce exultation, raced around the left side of the line. He ran wide, running outside his interference after it had cut in to avoid the Clinton end. The Sadler stands burst into a din of sound as they saw who had the ball. But when Carl sought to turn in near the side of the field he found himself pocketed by three lunging tacklers. Two of them struck him and bore him joltingly to the ground. He had lost two yards.

Nothing daunted, Carl leaped to his feet and dropped back into position as the teams lined up again.

"What do you think your interference is for?" O'Neill shouted in his ear. The quarterback's face, mud-smeared, looked particularly vicious.

Carl grinned.

"They didn't help me much that time! Where were they?"

"Signals!" bawled O'Neill.

The Sadler line made a hole for Fullback Larrimer who went through for three yards. Smalley added two more on a short run around end. Sadler punted.

Clinton tried four downs but failed to make its yards. Sadler's ball again, this time on Clinton's forty-yard mark.

O'Neill called Carl's signal on the first play, turning to order in an undertone: "Now follow that interference!"

Carl went around the end with his hand against O'Neill's back. The Sadler rooters cheered wildly as he made a five-yard gain.

"That's the stuff!" encouraged O'Neill.

Larrimer plowed into the center of the Clinton line for two yards, but limped back to his position. O'Neill called time out while he massaged the Sadler fullback's right knee.

The game resumed. Carl's number again

for a criss-cross around right end! The ball went to Smalley who slipped it to Carl as they passed each other behind the line.

"Follow me!" yelled O'Neill.

From the stands it looked as though the play had Clinton baffled. Most of the line shifted to the left, expecting a drive on that side.

"It's a touchdown sure!" an onlooker shrieked.

Carl, with visions of winning undying fame, swung inside his interference, seeing an open field ahead. He crossed a white-chalked line. At the right, out of the corner of his eye, he could see the interference, running clear and toward the goal. He saw the Clinton right end go sprawling as O'Neill hit him. Then he became conscious of someone close behind him. Carl glanced over his shoulder. Just at that moment the Clinton quarterback dove. Carl leaped ahead, frantically, but too late. He felt his feet go out from under him and the earth seemed to rise up and hit him.

The ball, jostled from his arms by the impact, bounded a few feet away. Carl rolled over in a frenzied effort to regain it but a Clinton back, charging in, swooped up the leather and set off for the Sadler goal.

Shouts of triumph changed into cries of despair as it was seen that there was no stopping the Clinton runner. Carl, rising dazedly, watched three of his team-mates give hopeless chase. The Clintonite romped gleefully over the goal line for a touchdown. The effort to add a point after touchdown failed, as Sadler blocked the kick.

Score, Clinton High, 6; Sadler Prep, 0.

"What do you think of yourself now?" O'Neill blazed disgustedly. "Still the whole team?"

Carl made no answer. A minute before, the prospective hero, he was now being booed by Sadler and applauded by Clinton. It was evident to the spectators that he would have scored a touchdown had he followed his interference.

"Where's your head?" a rooter jeered.

"That's the biggest part of him!" another chided.

Suddenly it dawned mercilessly upon Carl why Coach Behler had chosen Jerry in place of him. Carl had played for himself . . . Jerry had played for the team. Carl had always been looking for a chance to "grandstand" . . . Jerry had been intent only on doing his part.

Carl might be the better player but the team was better off without him . . . better off with a player who sacrificed individual effort for teamwork. It was a new sensation, this cold picturing of himself. How well the coach had known him! Had sized him up even in practice and had tried to guard the team against him! And here he had been blaming others; had cried favoritism; had boldly asserted his superiority!

In that moment, Carl—for the first time in his life—was willing to eat humble pie. He would do anything to atone—*anything*. But atoning would be hard . . . perhaps impossible. He had lost the sympathy of the crowd, and of his team-mates. He had probably lost the game. Such a brand of football as Clinton was playing to-day made a one-touchdown advantage practically insurmountable. Oh, he had been a cad . . . permitting Campbell to bluff sickness so that he could get his chance . . . chance to show off. That was all he had wanted . . . a chance to show off . . . not a chance to help his team win. It was Winstrom . . . instead of Sadler. Winstrom! Winstrom! Winstrom!

Carl played through the remainder of the

first half, greatly disheartened. He was not called upon to carry the ball again. His only consolation was in stopping the Clinton full-back after the big fellow had made a gain of eleven yards. This time, when the stands cheered his name, Carl fell to crying softly. O'Neill looked at him curiously but withheld comment.

At the end of the half, Carl went straight to Coach Behler.

"I—I've an apology to make," he said, "I've been criticizing you all over school for playing Jerry instead of me. I know why you did it now. I'm a rotter, Coach . . . a rotter! I thought I amounted to so much . . . I thought I didn't need the other fellows on the team to . . . do my stuff. But that isn't the worst . . . it's what I let Jerry do for me that hurts most!"

"Jerry? . . . What . . ."

"Oh, Coach, he isn't sick! He's just pretending so you'd have to use me. You see . . . he thought . . ."

Coach Behler pushed the penitent Carl aside and strode quickly toward the Behler cheering section. He stood a moment, scanning the sea of faces. Tapping Helfant, Sad-

ler yell leader, on the shoulder, he commanded: "Get Jerry Campbell for me. Find out if he's in the crowd. If he isn't, get some fellows to help you and look for him all over town. Go to his home first. He's supposed to be sick. But don't let him kid you. If he's in bed with two nurses and three doctors, drag him out and bring him to me. Double quick, Helfant! Get a move on!"

"But the cheering, sir? . . . What'll the school do without . . ."

"The game, my dear Helfant! The *game*! What do we care about the cheering?"

Under such urging, the Sadler yell leader got busy. A megaphone inquiry failed to locate the very much desired Jerry. Helfant mustered a small squad of students and raced with them across Sadler field, disappearing through a hole in the fence on a short cut to town.

Coach Behler, returning to his team, told them a few things calculated to stiffen spines, and sent them into the second half against Clinton, full of fight.

"Am—am I to stay in?" gasped Carl, as the whistle blew and the coach had announced no change in the line-up.

"Till I get hold of Jerry," snapped the

coach. "Meanwhile it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to show some of that stuff he believed you had!"

The fellow who had thought himself the better half, grabbed up his headgear and charged out upon the field. Team-mates glanced at him coolly. They felt none too cordial toward the individual whose personal vanity had jeopardized their winning the biggest game of the year. Carl sensed their attitude.

"Give me a chance, fellows!" he pleaded. "A real chance this time! I don't want to star . . . I—I just want to do what I can to—to help win for Sadler!"

There was something in Carl's appeal which gripped them.

"Get in there!" raved O'Neill. "We'll give you a chance all right! Larrimer's thrown his trick knee out again! Got to double up somewhere . . . and you're *it*!"

"Come on!" invited Carl, grimly, "Put me to work! I ought to be crushing stone!"

"Just crush that Clinton line," advised Larrimer, dryly. "It's hard as rock!"

Clinton kicked off and Carl soon had the chance he craved to go into action. O'Neill

called his number with the ball on Sadler's twenty-three-yard line and the second down. Carl stuck to his interference, ripped through the line and kept going even after two tacklers had hit him, dragging them four additional yards for an eleven-yard gain.

"Atta boy!" rasped O'Neill, helping the determined left half to his feet. "Let's go again!"

Clinton knew that the same player was to carry the ball on the next formation, but so furious was Carl's assault that he tore through for six more yards. Smalley took the pigskin after that and made it another first down. The Sadler rooters went wild with hope. Clinton high had been noted all season as the one team in the state whose goal line had remained uncrossed. The inspired advance that Sadler was making now . . . if it could only last. Clinton called time out to talk things over and to bolster several wavering spots in its line.

And, while Clinton was doing this, a great cry went up as Helfant, Sadler cheer leader, was seen to appear on the field heading an odd procession. Behind him marched six Sadler fellows, carrying a stretcher upon which re-

clined a very sick young man . . . a young man who was so sick that he grinned from ear to ear . . . and jumped off the stretcher unaided when he was brought before Coach Behler.

“Yea, Jerry! Yea! Yea! Yea!” boomed the stands. The crowd couldn’t quite get the straight of things but it knew that something was up and wanted to make a noise about it. The news, of course, had gotten around about Jerry’s having been taken suddenly ill . . . but sight of him now, in the waning minutes of the third quarter, dressed ready for play . . . well, there must have been a shingle loose somewhere. And Sadler folks didn’t care what the shingle *was* just so Jerry got into the game and Sadler kept up her offensive and . . . but . . . but . . .

Carl, seeing the fellow who had beaten him out for the left half position, came running to the side lines.

“Here! Where you going?” cried the coach.

“Me? . . . Why . . . Jerry’s . . .” stammered Carl.

“Jerry’s going in at right half; Smalley goes to full in place of Larrimer and you stay right where you are!” instructed the coach. “Get

out on that field, both of you! And let's see you make Clinton look sick!"

Larrimer, limping in to the bench, paused to shake hands with Jerry and Carl as they trotted out to the team with a din raging about them.

"Lots of luck!" he wished. "Fight 'em, buddies! Fight 'em! Isn't this heck? My trick knee!"

"Great guy—Larrimer," said Jerry, as the whistle shrieked for resumption of the game. "Isn't that just like him . . . never thinking of himself!"

"I've got something to tell you when I get a chance!" called Carl, as they fell into position.

"Signals!" screeched O'Neill.

And the game was on again!

Clinton High had evidently done some tall talking. Sadler soon found the defense much tighter. Despite a five-yard advance by Jerry, two more plays made it necessary to punt. Smalley, talking over the rôle of fullback, performed creditably with a forty-yard kick which carried to Clinton's ten-yard mark.

Third quarter over!

Score—Clinton High, 6; Sadler Prep, 0.

“Looks like that one bad break was enough to decide the game,” ventured a Sadler rooter, dolefully. “We’re not quite equal to making a steady advance against that powerful Clinton line!”

Going into the last quarter, it appeared that the statement made of Sadler was only too true. Clinton was forced to punt after taking the ball past mid-field. With the pigskin again in her position, Sadler desperately resorted to passes in an effort to get somewhere. A spectacular toss by Smalley which was gathered in by the right end, netted twenty-five yards and revived Sadler spirit. This brought the ball out to Sadler’s forty-seven-yard line. Jerry and Carl were good for four yards apiece. Time was growing short. Clinton’s goal was still city blocks away. The Clinton line was practically unyielding. Enough so, at least, to prevent a touchdown in the minutes remaining.

And then, to end all hope, Clinton intercepted a forward pass! The player who caught the ball was downed in his tracks by Jerry. Sadler rooters settled back resignedly to watch the finish of the seesaw struggle. It had been a remarkably even battle. Neither eleven had

been able to do much against the other. The closeness of the combat made it all the more lamentable that it was to be decided by what, in football parlance, was known as a "break." Carl Winstrom's fumble, with Sadler's one scoring chance in sight, had presented Clinton with her margin of victory. Under these circumstances, a doubly hard game to lose!

"Hold 'em!" begged O'Neill, as Clinton lined up offensively.

"Get that ball for me again!" cried Carl, frenziedly. "Just give me another chance! Another chance! I'll take it across! I'll . . ."

Jerry lunged over and shook Carl roughly.

"Pipe down!" he ordered. "You've done the best you could. You've . . ."

"Yea, Sadler! Yea!"

The Sadler line, still fighting, had broken through and downed the Clinton man with the ball for a five-yard loss.

Less than two minutes of play!

A long punt into Sadler territory and the game would be over.

"Spread out, gang!" barked O'Neill.

It was growing dusk and the air was crisp. Breaths of the players showed in little quick clouds of white. Both teams were weary of the

going. Clinton would be glad to hear the sound of the whistle. Sadler, hanging on doggedly, steeled herself against such a sound. It was not pleasant to hear a whistle screech defeat.

Plunk!

The ball left the Clinton kicker's toe and time-keepers consulted their watches.

Sailing on a low, twisting line, the pigskin carried thirty-five yards, directly between Jerry and Carl. Jerry, running sidewise to make the catch, glimpsed Carl—also trying for the ball.

“Take it!” he cried, and lurched ahead to form the interference.

O'Neill ten yards further on . . . and Smalley, thudding in from behind, joined Jerry—a queer-looking little phalanx—armed to the teeth with the desperation born of despair . . . and one, last fervent hope!

The fellow who had thought he was the better half did not need to be told to follow his interference now. He was only too glad to accept the meager protection afforded by the three . . . it seemed meager enough as he eyed lumbering figures looming up . . . figures with arms outstretched . . . intent on encircling those arms about his legs . . . and dragging

him down . . . dragging him down when this was his last chance to make good . . . *his last chance!*

"Good boy, O'Neill!" Carl muttered between clenched teeth, as the Sadler quarterback blocked a tackler from his path. "Good boy!"

"Go on!" screamed O'Neill. "Go on! Go on!"

Now Carl's immediate interference was cut down to two. Other team-mates had closed in ahead and taken care of such Clinton men as they could reach, but the field had become widely scattered. He was out in the open, with tacklers bearing at him from both sides!

"This way!" shrieked Jerry, and veered off to the left. Smalley turned to the right and threw his body in front of two threatening Clintonites. All three went down in a heap.

And now it was Jerry and Carl alone!

And the enemy's goal but twenty yards in front!

Twenty yards! Carl's feet felt like cement blocks. It took a great effort to lift each leg. He was sure he must be tottèring. The ground seemed to be swaying under him. He put out a hand, pushing it against the back of Jerry's jersey. Jerry tottered, too, under the weight

. . . but braced . . . and slowed up to lend what support he could.

Fifteen yards . . . three more white chalk marks . . . and two more grim-faced figures . . . figures with eyes as big as saucers and huge, twitching fingers! He must get past them somehow. He must! Time was most certainly up. The game ended with this play. It was a touchdown or defeat . . . a touchdown or defeat . . . and a touchdown meant at least a tie . . . at least a tie!

“Get those birds, Jerry!” he called. “Get ‘em! I—I can’t . . .”

The two grim-faced figures split apart, making it impossible for the lone interferer to get both. He just did manage to fall in front of the first one as the figure dove for the hips of the man with the ball. But the other figure, smashing in under an intended straight arm, caught hold of the runner.

Clinton rooters arose en masse with a throat-splitting yell. The sensational dash had been stopped on the five-yard line . . . and the game was over.

But—was it? Though tackled, the runner had not fallen. He had staggered . . . and lurched forward as though in the act of falling

. . . had recovered his balance . . . had managed to keep moving. . . straining . . . twisting . . . legs still driving . . . pulling his tackler along the ground after him . . . a tackler whose arms had slipped too low . . . so low that the runner had jerked one foot loose . . . and now . . .

“He’s over!”

Three thousand Sadlerites pounded each other on the back, threw perfectly good hats away, indulged in paroxysms of delirious joy. The paroxysms were multiplied by two a moment later when Smalley toed an inflated object over a bar for the point which gave Sadler seven to Clinton’s six.

It was some little while later, when Jerry and Carl were reposing wearily but happily under neighboring shower baths, that Jerry was reminded to ask: “By the way, Carl—what was that you were going to tell me as soon as you got the chance?”

“Oh, yes!” said Carl, wrinkling up his brow until the water formed along it in little ridges. “Let’s see—what was it?” He stood a moment thinking. “That’s funny, I can’t seem to . . .” Jerry, watching, saw a sheep-

ish expression flash across Carl's face. "Ho, of course! . . . It was just that—*you're* the better half!"

"Not me!" protested Jerry, thus starting a friendly argument which was never settled.

THE HONORARY SUBSTITUTE

NATURE had treated Ward Engstrom unkindly. She had given him a dwarfed right leg which hung useless from the knee. And then, as if to mock him, she had filled Ward with the hopeless desire to take part in athletic sports as other boys.

While in his early teens, Ward had tried courageously to overcome his handicap. But he had finally been forced to quit his efforts at keeping pace with his companions. It was simply impossible to drag a leg with steel braces over the ground as fast as other fellows could go. This meant then, that if he were to get much out of life, he must perfect himself in other ways.

Ward did have a good pair of arms. He could stand in one place and play catch with his chums. The boys all liked him. They counted him in on everything they could. When it came to baseball they would let Ward bat

and if he hit the ball one of the fellows would run for him. But how Ward yearned for the active part of the games which he would always have to miss!

It was hardest of all when Ward reached high school and saw his boy friends going out for different athletic teams. The students, sympathizing with his desire to play, elected Ward yell leader. For two years Ward led Butler High in its spirited cheers for "Team! Team! Team!" And then he had to give it up. He couldn't stand it any longer.

Coach Sutton was a middle-aged man, much beloved by the student body. He was pleasantly surprised, one early afternoon in September, to be paid a visit by Ward. The coach had always liked the boy . . . had admired his cheerful fortitude in the face of physical discouragement.

"Well, Ward, what can I do for you?"

The eyes of the boy in front of him glistened. He pulled himself to a nearly erect position, shifting his weight adroitly to his good leg, and asked: "Please, sir, could I get out for the football team?"

Stunned with surprise and not wanting to hurt Ward's feelings, the coach hesitated.

"Why, I don't know, Ward. I'd never thought . . ."

"Oh, I don't mean to really play . . . but just to get out . . . to practice with the fellows . . . to wear a—a suit . . . so I could almost think I was going to play!"

There was such a yearning in those eyes that Coach Sutton acted against his better judgment.

"I guess you could—if you were careful."

Ward's eyes filled with happy tears. He did not try to thank the coach. He turned about and hobbled out.

Coach Sutton listened to the dull bump of the steel-braced foot as it swung down the stairs and then the step—drag—step as the movement reached the level of the sidewalk.

"Pluckiest fellow in Butler High," he said, huskily.

It caused a big sensation the first night Ward came out for football practice. Student on-lookers could hardly believe their eyes. The most familiar figure in school was completely attired in football togs, from the leather head-gear to the cleated shoes. And Ward was easily holding his own in a ring of players who

were passing the ball. Even Coach Sutton was surprised at the manner with which Ward hurled the pigskin. His passes were swift and accurate, made by a quick, natural whip of the arm.

It took some time for Butler High to accept Ward in his new rôle. Everyone knew of Ward's athletic interest and the whole school sympathized with his aspirations. The word was passed about that the coach and players were humoring him. Ward was seen to take no part in actual scrimmage. But after the first week, the coach had given Ward the privilege of sending members of the squad in pursuit of forward passes.

Next to Larry Owen, star Butler fullback, it was soon admitted that no one could compare with Ward when it came to throwing the ball. Short or long passes, high or low—made no difference—Ward shot them with surprising force and deadly aim. He seemed to delight in hurling the ball to a team-mate who would be running at top speed, timing the distance he would have to launch the pigskin ahead of the runner so that ball and player would connect.

There were other places where Ward could help out. He would act as center, passing the

ball back through his legs while candidates for the backfield positions practiced making a speedy get-away.

And how Ward enjoyed these practice sessions! He was the hardest worker on the team . . . the first on the field and the last to leave. Sympathy that others held for him changed to honest admiration. One quite often heard such comment as: "If it only wasn't for that leg!"

The night before the first game, as if by common consent, the players gathered at one end of the field—Coach Sutton with them. In a few minutes they called Ward over. He came, with a jumpy shuffle, wondering what it was all about.

Coach Sutton acted as spokesman.

"Ward, I hope you can understand the way this is meant. The fellows feel that you are entitled to a place on the first team. I do, too. So . . . so we've given you the position of . . . of honorary substitute."

The coach had not imagined it would be so difficult to make this little announcement. He was conscious of a new spirit in the players about him.

Ward stood for a moment, dumbly. He tried

to speak. Some of the players turned away and kicked their toes in the sod. Ward mastered his feelings with an appreciative smile.

“Do you think I can play that position all right?” he asked.

And so it was that Ward appeared on the field with the team before every game and between halves. The coach employed him in passing the ball and the crowd cheered Ward sincerely for his exhibition. While Butler High was battling its opponents, Ward sat on the side lines with the other substitutes and imagined that he might be called on the field any minute. Sometimes he was able to preserve this illusion up until the very moment that the coach would speak a substitute's name. Then Ward would slap the more fortunate one on the back and tell him to “Get in there! Give 'em all you've got!” Rubbing shoulders with those who actually took part in the game was a joy right next to playing.

As the season progressed, it became apparent that Butler High had one of the strongest elevens in years. Students began to rave over the possibilities of Butler beating its long-standing rival, Trenton High. This school al-

ways put a powerful team on the field. The approaching game was assuming the proportions of a championship contest this year as both schools, because of their victories, were virtually entitled to claim state laurels.

Coach Sutton laid much stress upon the development of a forward passing attack in the last two weeks before the biggest game of the season. Trenton High had not been scored upon all year and was widely heralded for its defensive strength.

Ward watched his team in action. He studied every play. He knew the signals as well as Quarterback Nelson. He could almost foretell every move the team was going to make. The forward passing of Fullback Owen interested Ward most of all. He felt as though this was one department of the game which could not entirely be denied him. Ward could sit back and dream that he was out on the field in Owen's place, hurling the pigskin at some fleeting Butler player. And when Owen's pass would find its mark, Ward would experience a sort of second-handed exultation.

Trenton High came to Butler confident of victory. The visitors outweighed their opponents some eight pounds to the man. Trenton's

season record, as compared with Butler's, showed a greater scoring power. The Trenton eleven swept on the field with an imposing dash. Its attitude was like that of a steam roller about to ride roughshod over its last obstacle.

Ward felt his blood tingle as he looked out upon the clock-like work of the Trenton team. Butler High might have a speedier team but Trenton appeared to be smoother, sturdier. It was a question whether Butler, with a light, shifty attack could successfully cope against Trenton's heavy, smashing one.

Taking the offensive at the start, Trenton High carried the ball down the field on a series of line plunges and short end runs. There were no spectacular gains. The Butler team yielded ground slowly, grudgingly. But, to the spectators, it looked like a good big man pushing a good little one ahead of him. Trenton took the ball to Butler's ten-yard line where the Butler defense stiffened for a last stand.

Ward knelt on the side lines, nervously pulling up the sod and glancing at the strained faces of the substitutes about him, each eager to get in the game.

"Touchdown, Trenton!" begged the supporters of the Purple and Gold.

“Hold ’em, Butler!” entreated the Red and White.

And Butler held desperately for three downs, Trenton gaining but two scant yards. On the last down the Trenton fullback attempted to place a drop-kick between the goal posts but the ball was blocked as it left his toe.

Amid a frenzy of cheers, Butler took possession of the pigskin on its twenty-yard line. Then Butler tried out Trenton’s forward wall but found it unyielding. The Trenton line came charging through to drop Fullback Owen for a four-yard loss. Not wanting to take any chances so early in the game, Quarterback Nelson called for a punt. Trenton recovered the ball in midfield.

Not to be denied, the heavier Trenton team resumed its drive toward the Butler goal. It became apparent, to the onlookers, that the Butler line was being worn down by the persistent, relentless smash of the Trenton team. Weight was beginning to tell. As the whistle blew for the ending of the first quarter, the Trenton fullback crashed over Butler’s goal line for a touchdown. The attempt to add a point after touchdown failed.

Score, Trenton 6; Butler 0.

It had been a great game thus far, with Butler spirit making up for any lack in weight or power. The crowd gave Butler a lusty cheer.

Butler's first offensive flash came in the second quarter when Fullack Owen broke away for a twenty-yard run around right end.

Ward almost forgot that he was not still yell leader at this moment of the game.

Although Butler took the ball to its forty-yard line it was forced to punt again when the Trenton defense tightened.

Once more Trenton, with machine-like precision, started a march down the field, using nothing but straight football. The Butler line was pierced for gain after gain. There seemed to be no stopping this steady hammering.

Coach Sutton sent in two substitute linesmen to take the places of Butler regulars who were wearied from standing the brunt of the Trenton attack.

Ward, biting his lips, saw the substitutes dash into the fray and the mud-smeared regulars start for the side lines reluctantly. In all other games, Ward had been content to look on, to feel the closeness of the conflict, to thrill over the exploits of his team-mates. But now

he was seized with a fierce desire to take part, a desire which caused him to forget his crippled leg.

Despite Butler's courageous resistance, Trenton moved down the field and pushed over a second touchdown. The attempted point after touchdown was blocked.

Score, Trenton 12; Butler 0.

At the end of the first half, Coach Sutton took his players to one side. They appeared a bit crestfallen but soon brightened up under the magic of his words.

"You're far from beaten! You've played Trenton to a standstill. They've had to fight for every inch of ground they've gained. And they'll have to fight twice as hard this half! We haven't really opened up yet. This next half is yours, fellows, just as much as the first was Trenton's. Are you going out after it?"

With a chorus of spirited "Yeahs!" the Butler players jumped to their feet and trotted out on the field as time was called.

Trenton, well satisfied with a lead of two touchdowns over its rival, gave evidence that it was going to take the defensive for the rest of the game.

Butler, knowing that its only hope lay in tak-

ing the aggressive, sought to penetrate the Trenton defense. The third quarter developed into a punting duel with Owen of Butler getting a little the better of the exchanges.

Near the end of the quarter, a Trenton player fumbled one of Owen's twisting spirals on his thirty-yard line. Johnny Melbourne, Butler right end, came racing in and dropped on the ball. The Butler rooters roared. This was the nearest that Butler had been to the Trenton goal during the entire game—thirty yards!

The Butler team lined up, fired with a new determination. On the first play, Owen faked a pass and ran around left end for seven yards. On the second play the star fullback again made as if to throw a pass and added four more yards around the other end. Butler supporters were going wild. Ward alternately hugged and pounded the substitute next to him. Butler had made a first down. Ball on Trenton's nineteen-yard line! Time called for end of third quarter.

With the resumption of play, Butler unleashed its first pass. Owen threw accurately to Melbourne at right end who was downed in his tracks on Trenton's six-yard line. The Trenton goal line had never been as closely

threatened all season. The team was on edge. Quarterback Nelson called on Owen to carry the ball. He tried the Trenton line but it turned him back for a yard loss. He tried again, this time gaining a bare foot. Butler fans were madly screaming for a touchdown.

A short pass was knocked down . . . almost intercepted. Butler's last down—the goal to make.

Placing reliance upon Owen, Quarterback Nelson once more gave him the ball. The Butler team, straining every ounce of energy, made a path for him. He dodged around left end, shook off two tacklers and fell over the goal line. Then it looked as though the whole Trenton team piled on him.

“It's a touchdown!” screamed Butler enthusiasts as the players rolled off the prostrate Owen and the ball could be seen a good two inches over the line. But the touchdown had been gained at the expense of an injury to Owen. He had suffered a badly wrenched right elbow. The arm hung limp at his side.

Owen insisted on staying in the game. He took his position as Butler lined up to try for the point after touchdown. It was seen that Owen intended to kick. As Quarterback Nelson

knelt with outstretched hands, the ball came back. He caught it deftly, upended it, Owen's foot swung true and the pigskin skimmed across the bar.

Score, Trenton 12; Butler 7!

Chagrined at being scored on, Trenton lined up, bent on getting a small measure of revenge. Butler kicked off and Trenton began another fierce advance.

Butler substitutes groaned as they saw the one player in whom slight hope of victory lay, doing what he could to stop the Trenton onslaught but virtually out of the game.

Four minutes more of play and Trenton near another touchdown! Coach Sutton paced anxiously up and down the side lines. He shot a calculating glance at his string of eager substitutes. Trenton stands were singing: "Trenton's going to score . . . going to score some more!"

Just at that moment a something happened which brought the crowd to its feet with a mighty shout.

Trenton tried a pass. The Trenton right end was under the ball, reaching out his hands to receive it. He had a clear path ahead of him to the goal, fifteen yards away.

Tearing across the field, in an effort to prevent the catch, the Butler left end leaped in front of the Trenton player, the tips of his fingers struck the ball—juggled it—juggled it just enough so that he could make another frantic grab at it. . . .

As the Butler left end made the catch, the Trenton player tackled him and brought him to the ground. But it was Butler's ball!

While the field fairly reverberated with a bedlam of sound, Owen raised his left arm, calling time out. He was taking himself from the game!

The game was as good as over. The only player who might have been of service in the present crisis lost to the team!

Coach Sutton, with sinking heart, turned to name a substitute. As he did so he felt someone clutch his arm.

"Please, Coach! It—it's my chance! I—I've waited all year for it. I've dreamed about it. Let me go in. It won't hurt me . . . to *forward pass!*"

A sudden hush of astonishment came over the crowd as it saw one of the strangest sights ever witnessed on a football field. It is doubtful if there was a person in that entire throng

but that did not fight back the tears . . . and no one could tell exactly why they felt like crying.

For, coming on the field, in a half-dragging, half-hopping motion was the honorary substitute! As he passed big Larry Owen, the Butler fullback held out his left hand. The substitute grasped it . . . reassuringly . . . as much as to say, "Everything's all right, old fellow. I've come to carry on in your place!"

Oh, it was pathetic . . . the exalted, confident way about him. How he trailed his useless leg over the trampled up ground and reported to the referee with all the bearing of a veteran. The Trenton team looked on sympathetically. Ward Engstrom's entrance into the game meant but one thing—that Butler had conceded defeat. And the school was just giving this unfortunate chap the desire of a lifetime.

But to the Butler players, Ward's coming brought a choked up feeling in their throats . . . a lump that hardened into a great resolve. It was almost as if some supernatural power had taken hold of them . . . so deeply were they stirred.

As Ward took the fullback position, there

was no doubting the intentions of the Butler team. It would open up in one last frantic attempt to score by the forward passing route. Three minutes to play and the ball on Butler's fifteen-yard line!

The teams lined up . . . the Butler line spreading across the field. Ward stood on his five-yard line, Quarterback Nelson a few feet in front.

Whistle!

The ball snapped back. It seemed as if every Butler player was shot out of a gun, so determinedly did they get away. All eyes were centered on the honorary substitute. The pass was wide. He had to make a staggering jump for it but he caught it. A Trenton guard came lunging up. Ward hopped to the side, swinging his leg so that the steel braces flashed in the late afternoon sun. At the far side of the field the Butler left end was running free. Ward sighted him. He steadied himself to throw; the Trenton guard was almost upon him.

The ball left Ward's hand just as the guard hit him. Ward went down in a heap. Quarterback Nelson, who had blocked two other players, came running up to help Ward to his feet.

But the honorary substitute was already getting up . . . his eyes set upon the flight of the ball.

It was a thirty-yard heave that Ward had made. The Butler left end scooped the ball in on the run and set off for the Trenton goal, fifty-five yards away.

Ward, leaning on Quarterback Nelson for support, was following along in an effort to keep up with the play.

Two Trenton players, giving mad chase, were forcing the Butler runner to the side lines. They brought him down with a thud on their thirty-five-yard line.

The Trenton stands sighed with relief . . . then rose to cheer the honorary substitute to the echo. He would be the hero of the game even though Butler had lost. Only two minutes more to play and no chance for such a lucky happening again.

Crazed with joy, the Butler team lined up quickly. The Trenton team smiled its confidence. This time Ward seemed scarcely to get the ball in his hands before he had thrown it. So quickly did it travel that many did not see the play until they heard the hollow plunk of



THE FIELD WAS IN AN HYSTERICAL UPROAR.

the ball as it struck the chest of the Butler right end.

Johnny Melbourne, ball tucked under his arm, dodged, turned and twisted through the open field. Sobered now, the Trenton team raced after him. A touchdown meant the game! They had been too cocksure. This player must be stopped. A Trenton tackler dove and missed as the Butler right end tore across the twenty-yard line. But in trying to evade the tackle, Johnny had stumbled. He fell face downward, rolled over, bounded to his feet but was struck from behind and brought to earth on the Trenton ten-yard line.

The field was in an hysterical uproar.

Johnny crawled to his feet, sobbing brokenheartedly.

"I—I lost the game!" he said as Ward, hobbling up, put his arm around him.

The timekeepers bent over their watches.

Thirty seconds to play!

The crowd gasped as the Butler eleven dug its toes in the dirt and the honorary substitute motioned once more for the ball.

Trenton, made desperately wary by the sudden bewildering change of things, crouched with

hands clenching the air in a determination to stay further advance.

Standing on the Trenton fifteen-yard line, with his weight resting heavily on his left foot, the honorary substitute caught the ball and poised it on the palm of his hand, looking about for a safe opening.

In that agonizing moment there came to Ward the realization that Trenton had effectively covered every Butler player. There was not a team-mate to whom he could throw the ball. A Trenton lineman was charging in. It would soon be too late.

And then, a thrill unlike any ever experienced by followers of football, electrified every on-looker.

Coach Sutton, who had followed the play in breathless suspense . . . uttered a hollow exclamation and turned his face away. Big Larry Owen leaped to his feet, body tense.

Out on the field, fifteen yards . . . now fourteen . . . now thirteen . . . stumbling, almost falling, but seeming to recover balance just as a plunge to earth appeared inevitable . . . ran the honorary substitute.

The useless leg swung free of the ground. It looked as though he kicked it forward each time

he jumped with the one good limb. The crippled foot would strike the sod for an instant as the other leg bent at the knee for the next jerky hop.

For a second, the Trenton team watched the lurching form . . . both fascinated and thunderstruck. Then came the stunning comprehension that this figure was rapidly menacing their goal line . . . that if allowed to cross . . . it meant . . . *the game!*

Equally astounded, but just as quick to grasp the situation, the scattered Butler team sprang into action. As every Trenton player had endeavored to cover a Butler man to prevent a possible forward pass, the Butler players now turned to block their opponents to prevent a tackler from reaching the one who was carrying the ball.

At the five-yard line, Norris, big Butler guard, fell in front of a Trenton tackler just as his arms reached out to clutch the tottering substitute.

At the three-yard line a Trenton player did get his hands on the bounding body. A great shriek went up as the man with the ball swung on his good leg, straining forward with a tackler clinging fast to the steel-braced ankle.

Reaching out his hands as far as he could in front of him, the honorary substitute fell. While in the act of falling it seemed that half a dozen players struck him at once—Butler and Trenton alike. The impact knocked him forward.

Simultaneously, the shrill whistle of the timekeepers announced the end of the game. It was with difficulty that the excited crowd was restrained from pouring on the field before the mass of players could be pulled apart.

Trenton and Butler rooters stood by, not knowing how to cheer.

The referee dug down into the human pile over the goal line until he came to a twisted leg housed in a steel brace. He yanked the Trenton tackler's grasp loose from the brace and pulled two other players off the body.

The honorary substitute lay face down, hands far in front . . . and under those hands . . . pushed just over the last white-chalked line . . . was a mud-covered football.

The referee waved his arm.

Loving hands carried the unconscious Ward to the side lines. He had been deprived of his wind.

Coach Sutton and the Butler team gathered around.

The honorary substitute opened his eyes dazedly. Someone raised him to a sitting position. He looked down at his useless leg with the gaze of one just awakening from sleep. Then he burst into tears.

His team-mates glanced at him wonderingly.

"I—I dreamed I made a touchdown," he said.

Coach Sutton shook Ward gently.

"Wake up! That's just what you did!"

THE GENTLEMAN FULLBACK

DID I know Dahl Strickler? Did I *know* him? Say, what you trying to do, kid me? Old "Soft Heart," you mean? Huh! I'd ought to have known him! I was quarterback of the team he played on!

Oh, I see. Somebody tipped you off, did they? Guess they knew that all it took to get me started was to mention his name.

Sure I'll tell you about him! Naw, it's a funny thing. He's one fellow I never get tired talking about. S'pose you've noticed how folks in this town are all "hepped" on him yet? That's because there wasn't any finer bird ever drew breath than Dahl Strickler, no matter if he *did* have peculiar ideas on sportsmanship.

Yeah . . . back in '16. Ten years! Doesn't seem possible. But that's the year that Morton High had the football team everybody figured to take the state championship. Of course, if you've heard anything about Dahl at all, you've been told that he was the greatest all-around

athlete ever turned out by Morton. Facts are, though, Dahl was practically forced into football. His big specialty was track, ten second and all that stuff. And just because Dahl had shown no particular interest in football, he'd been left alone till the year that Morton loomed as a state contender. Then the coach and the student body and the fans, almost overnight, got the idea that Dahl—being such a wow of an athlete—would look mighty sweet in Morton's backfield . . . the last touch, as it were, in the effort that our school was to make for the championship. Bill Smedley's graduation had left us with only one weak spot to fill on an otherwise veteran eleven . . . and that weak spot happened to be fullback. A process of elimination on the hunt for likely prospects, settled unanimously on Dahl, and a committee was dispatched with instructions to sell him. The coach didn't give two hurrahs whether Dahl had ever seen a football before or not. He didn't have the slightest doubt but that, if Dahl could be prevailed upon to get into togs, he'd soon pick up the rudiments of the game. A fellow with such a wonderful physique as Dahl possessed, and with such a penchant for developing almost faultless form in everything

he entered, would soon adapt himself to grid-iron requirements. Of that, everybody was certain!

But I'm getting ahead of my story, as I usually do. You've first got to know a little more about Dahl, personally, in order to appreciate what's coming later. As far as looks and build were concerned, he was an Adonis and a Hercules combined, if you get what I mean. Nature hadn't smiled on him; she had just laughed out loud. With the body he'd been endowed with he just naturally couldn't help being a great athlete. But he might have been stuck up about it, which he wasn't. To the contrary, he was so modest and bashful that he'd often walk around a block or skip down an alley to steer clear of a compliment. Honest! And yet that fellow had one of the most wonderful personalities you ever ran into. Popular? Say, he was the idol of the school! Clean? Well, he set an example we're all trying to follow yet . . . and he didn't do it in a Sunday School way, either. Not that there's anything wrong about the Sunday School, but you know how a fellow detests anything that sounds like preaching. He'll swallow a lot, though, if he gets right living poured into him when he

doesn't suspect it. And that's what Dahl did for us, the funny part being that he didn't realize he was doing it . . . he was just *being himself* . . . and we, admiring him so much, were doing our best to imitate. Funny, too, it didn't dawn on us what an influence old "Soft Heart" had been until he was . . . was gone. But there I go—getting ahead of my story again.

I'll bet you're wondering by now where all this gab is leading to, anyway. 'Specially after my starting out as though Dahl was a comedy character and then making him out only two shades below a saint. Well, I 'spose every person has to have their queer streak regardless of who they are or how much you like them. Think over your list of friends, for instance. Can't you just about put your finger on something a little bit nutty in each one of 'em? And when you've got your finger placed, would you—honest, now—have that queer streak laundered out for love or money? 'Course you wouldn't!

Dahl's queer streak was what we used to call "an exaggerated idea of sportsmanship." He was such a thoroughly good sport in everything he did that he was *too good*. He carried

it to extremes. He wasn't ever satisfied unless he was sure his opponents held every advantage. And then he'd go out and beat them. But, even after handing them the drubbing under such circumstances, he had a habit of hunting his rivals up and practically apologizing. I can hear him saying yet, "Sorry, old man. You ran a great race!" And underneath it all you felt that he was sincerely regretting the fates which made it necessary for him to come in first in order to win a race. That's just how little the glory of the thing seemed to affect Dahl. He had the most consideration for the other fellow of anybody I ever knew. And yet, just because of this, Dahl was sometimes misunderstood . . . even resented.

Do you mind if I get sidetracked again for a minute? I'd awfully like to tell you of an incident that happened at the State Interscholastic Field meet, the first year that Dahl took part. It'll sort of give you an idea as to what extremes old "Soft Heart" would go and maybe, from this, you can come nearer to appreciating what we were up against when we got Dahl on the football team!

Dahl was entered that year, among other events, in the two-twenty-yard dash. So was

the great Bates of Carver High. Bates had clipped a second off the state record for the distance the year before. He was listed as a sure repeater. Dahl, practically an unknown then, wasn't rated to place. It had rained early that morning and the track wasn't as fast as it might have been. Despite this, Dahl surprised everybody by coming through to the finals in the event. In the finals there were seven men to leave their marks. And right away Dahl electrified the crowd by hitting it off neck and neck with Bates. For half the distance these two fellows led the field by five yards . . . everybody expecting to see Dahl crack under the strain, for Bates was out to better his record. But Dahl stuck, letting out a notch as Bates put on more speed. Folks all along the track went crazy at the prospects of a battle to the finish line . . . but just as they began cheering Bates had a tough break of luck. He slipped on a bad spot in the track, swung out of his stride and almost fell. The crowd groaned, of course, and Dahl—looking around to see what was up, deliberately slowed down so that Bates could catch him! Can you imagine that? Racing the state record holder for the distance and refusing to take the slight-

est advantage! Well,—it sounds almost incredible to tell it, but—with Bates back in his stride—Dahl uncorked a burst of running that carried him into the tape three yards ahead and put him in a tie with Bates for the record! That race was the most sensational event I ever saw on a track . . . lots more sensational than seeing Dahl break three records the following year. And don't forget, Dahl did his stuff that day on a heavy cinder path!

But that isn't the point to the incident. After the race, Dahl—in his gentlemanly sort of way—hunted up the great Bates who was naturally much chagrined over the outcome. And when Dahl expressed his sympathy to Bates for the unfortunate slip, the thanks he got for such expression was: “You swelled head! Thought you'd try to show me up, didn't you?” Bates just couldn't figure a fellow being as white as Dahl actually was.

What did other folks think? Oh, they gave him credit. How could they help it? State newspapers ran editorials on what they termed “one of the finest evidences of sportsmanship ever witnessed in high school competition.” Dahl was a marked athlete from then on . . . and a popular one with the crowd.

You know, I wish you could have seen Dahl's smile. Just a glimpse of it and you wouldn't have had any doubt about his sincerity or his character. I haven't seen a fellow with a smile that could compare with it. Dahl's smile came right from his heart. It had a way of "getting" you. I don't know how to describe it. It's pretty hard to put feelings into words. But maybe you've seen some person who had a smile something like it. If you have, whether you were acquainted or not, I'll bet you felt a glow all over. Gee, the friends Dahl made with that marvelous smile!

Oh, yes—football! I was getting to that. It took considerable arguing to bring Dahl out for the team. He couldn't quite see himself playing the game and his natural modesty made him depreciate what he might be able to accomplish along that line.

"You'd be a whiz if you ever got away to a clear field," I told him. "With your speed, the opposition would have a job laying hands on you!"

Dahl smiled at this, and shook his head. We soon discovered that we weren't getting anywhere by telling Dahl what a star player we thought he'd develop into. And it was Pinkey

Adams, left half, who hit upon Dahl's vulnerable spot . . . school spirit! Morton High needed Dahl Strickler's services, no matter how humble, more than at any time in his career as an athlete. Morton High possessed a team in the building which authorities quite generally agreed should make a strong bid for state honors. Morton High had never captured a state high school football championship. Dahl had already assisted his school in winning two much-coveted state track titles. He was *positively* the only fellow in school who gave promise of filling Bill Smedley's capable shoes. Wouldn't Dahl at least give the game a try long enough to satisfy competent judges as to whether any aptitude shown for the sport should justify his continuing with it? Dahl took this proposition under consideration. Certainly seemed fair enough. Hard to imagine that a rank novice like himself could be of any service to a football team. However, who was he to pass upon this point? If the coach thought he saw possibilities . . . and if no one else was available . . .

Shucks, there wasn't anything to it after that! Dahl took a quiet pride in everything he did. He wouldn't permit himself to go out for

anything and not develop some measure of perfection in it. As the coach had often said, "Strickler is a stickler for form." From the first night out, Dahl was the hardest worker on the squad. He understood how football was played, of course, but more from the spectator's point of view than that of an actual participant. His thorough athletic training was a great help to him, though, and it was really astonishing to see how quickly Dahl picked up various angles of the game under Coach Leonard's efficient tutoring. After the first month, you'd have thought Dahl had been playing football as long as any of us. He was averaging between forty and fifty yards at punting and I wish you could have seen his form when it came to hitting the line! Zowie! Dahl was so practiced in making a quick get-away in racing that he had some real speed up by the time he reached the line . . . and he usually shot through like a bullet, with his legs driving up and down like trip hammers. It took the secondary defense to stop him if he *was* stopped.

Tickled? Say, the town just about went cuckoo when folks found out about Dahl's latest. There was a tremendous crowd out for

the first game of the season which we played against Lakeside. Coach Leonard only used Dahl during the first half but, in his introductory game, Dahl got away for four touchdowns . . . one of them a seventy-yard run from the catch of a kick-off in which he reversed his field twice and ran the whole Lakeside team dizzy trying to down him. Oh, he looked sweet! So sweet that the coach kicked himself (figuratively of course!), for not having prevailed on Dahl to have gotten out two seasons before.

But Dahl, despite his brilliant performance, started in doing something after the first time I called on him to carry the ball that didn't make a hit with me. Can you guess what it was? Well, perhaps that's hardly a fair question. I'm sure I couldn't have guessed that Dahl would do what he did even as well as I thought I knew him. Just the same, what he did was so funny that our whole team about busted up laughing the first time he pulled it.

On the opening kick-off, we took the ball to our thirty-yard line and advanced it from there to a first down. I hadn't used Dahl so far and the crowd began hollering for me to slip him the ball, so I obliged. Dahl, getting the signal, came whizzing past me. I slammed the pigskin

against his stomach and he hit the line just off left tackle, pounding through as if a cannon ball had torn the hole. He left three would-be tacklers strewn out behind and got a look at the open country before anyone nabbed him. A nice little gain of twenty-one yards. But, while everyone was yelling their heads off, Dahl picked himself up and looked back at the birds he had bowled over. They were just getting to their feet, still dazed and wondering how far the cyclone had traveled. And—you'll die at this!—when Dahl saw the wreckage he had left in his wake, he came running back—all the cyclone taken out of him—and helped the Lakeside players to their feet, asking them if they'd been hurt in any way! If so, he was sorry. He hadn't meant to be rough!

Say, I couldn't believe my ears. The Lakeside fellows couldn't either. They looked more dazed than ever. But the minute everybody howled, the Lakeside boys figured that Dahl had been kidding them. Imagine a guy on an opposing team picking up the players he had knocked down and extending sympathy! It just wasn't done, that was all. And it got the other side's goat. Boy, how sore they were! They laid for Dahl every time he carried the ball after that

but it didn't do any good. Dahl did his dirty work first and cleaned it up afterwards with well-meant apologies. Most of the time he didn't have very long to right matters as the next play was under way so soon. But you'd have had to mark him "A" for good intentions. I stood this sort of thing as long as I could before I said anything. Then I broke loose.

"See here, Dahl," I said, "just where do you think you're getting by all those nice words?"

He looked at me kind of funny and pulled at the flap of his headgear. I could tell by that he was fussed.

"Football shouldn't be brutal," he answered, so low that Pinkey Adams and I were the only ones that heard it. "I'm not out to do anybody harm!"

Snickering snickers!

"Who said you was?" I snapped back. "A bump or two is all in the game. You don't have any kick coming when Pinkey spills a man, do you?"

Old "Soft Heart" looked rather sheepish for a second but he was there with a comeback.

"No, that's different," said he. "That's Pinkey's responsibility . . ."

Well, the game wasn't the place to argue

such a highly technical question out so I let Dahl have the last word. Besides, he was producing in highly satisfactory fashion with all his . . . what would you call it . . . *buffoonery*! Rip—smash—bang through the line . . . then, “Oh, I’m sorry!” . . . and rip—smash—bang and the whole process repeated. Louder and funnier . . . to everyone but me. I was looking ahead to the stiff games and wondering what this attitude would do. Why, it was already beginning to “get” me. In the second half, after Dahl had earned a rest, I found myself easing up on hitting the line for fear . . . yes, sir . . . *for fear* I might accidentally muss up a Lakeside player’s hair!

Right after the game I went to Coach Leonard and registered a private complaint. It was my little contention that, if Dahl kept this conduct up, he’d demoralize the team. But the coach was so pleased at having found someone who successfully plugged the gap at fullback that he laughed me off.

“If you fellows could tear through the line like he does, you might have something to apologize for, yourselves!” he said, which was about the same as Abraham Lincoln giving out word that his other generals had better take to drink-

ing some of the same stuff that General Grant did, if drinking was what made Grant so good.

“All right, all right . . . you wait and see!” I said to myself.

It wasn't that I'd taken offense at anything Dahl had done. You couldn't get sore at Dahl. He did everything so much in earnest. And yet, as the coach had suggested, Dahl just about had us in the palm of his hand. He was one of those athletes that folks say is “a law unto himself.” The coach's point was, “Why monkey with his temperament when he was performing like a Red Grange?” A person would put up with a lot of nonsense from a great singer. Didn't we remember when Madame Butterini had left the stage of the Morton Opera House because she'd felt a draft on her head? And what had happened when she was finally prevailed upon to give a return engagement with the offending draft removed? She played to standing room only! Well, Dahl wasn't anything like that. He was just over-conscientious. He was a bug on clean competition. He couldn't bear the thought that anyone should think he would purposefully commit an unsportsmanlike or ungentlemanly act. And football provided the crowning revelation

of just how far Dahl would go in the "soft heart" business.

Well, I didn't open my head again after getting the coach's reaction, but I did keep my eyes open to see whether Dahl's carrying on would get under the hides of the other fellows. On the contrary, it seemed to pep 'em up! Gee, maybe I wasn't surprised at that! Made me feel as though I'd turned in a false alarm. Besides, Dahl's peculiar characteristic soon took the state by storm. It was a scream to think of a backfield man who would tear an opposing line to shreds and then turn around and do his best to help build it up again. Papers poked a lot of fun at Dahl but gave him a lot of credit, too. And the farther along in the season we got, the more his name began to appear on sport writers' choices for all-state high school elevens. I used to read such headlines as "SOFT HEART HAS ANOTHER SOFT TIME—Five Touchdowns Against Warren Tech and a Thousand Pardons." Sounded colorful, you'll admit. Good publicity for the rest of our scheduled opponents to read, especially since we hadn't lost a game thus far and Dahl was the main cog in our great scoring machine. One editorial came out about this time with the

idea that Dahl Strickler was wise and knew his psychology. He was credited with having developed this "I'm sorry" stunt to unnerve the opposing team and numerous instances were cited to prove this contention . . . instances which went to show how elevens had blown up after a few of Dahl's line smashes followed by tender displays of sentiment over the havoc wrought. He never failed to make the opposition roaring mad or else confused because of an inability to stop the gentleman fullback. What a title—the gentleman fullback! When that *nom de plume* was first tacked on Dahl, I thought it would bring the finish of his tomfoolery. But, say—he *liked* it! He thought it was great. Gentleman fullback! There was public recognition at last of a virtue he had striven so zealously to preserve and employ! (Excuse me if I appear to wax eloquent in spots. It's a failing of mine . . . or perhaps it's because there's supposed to be something eloquent in the way gentlemen behave.) At any rate, the last game of the season caught Dahl Strickler at the height of his glory and Morton High at the crossroads of football supremacy!

Only Dayton High stood between us and the

championship of the state. *Only!* Mackerel, as if that wasn't enough! Dayton had been a two-time winner of the honor and had a record for the season that matched ours like a missing shoe. We had both battled through to our scheduled game without a defeat. And we had both cut off the championship hopes of every other high school football team of standing in the state. Upon our clash, then, hung an outcome which would go undisputed. The victorious eleven would immediately be proclaimed the king of all.

Coach Leonard was exceedingly optimistic over our prospects for taking Dayton into camp.

"What do we care if the game is played on Dayton's own field?" he said to me. "Dayton can't stop Dahl on any field and that's answer enough. I doubt if there's a high school team in the country that could stop him."

"Dahl's good," I admitted, feeling rather lame about the complaint I had made against him at the start of the season. "Our offense isn't worrying me any. It's our defense. If we . . ."

"Say! Say! Don't borrow trouble!" the coach butted in. "Every game we've played

so far we haven't had to rely heavily on defense. It's the other team that's had to do this. And we're going to carry the fight to Dayton the same way!"

Well, that was sound reasoning in the light of what had happened. Our strongest defense had been our terrific offense. The other teams hadn't been able to do much while we were carrying the ball . . . which had been the majority of the time. It had kept most of our opponents busy trying to hold old "Soft Heart" down, let alone trying to do a little scoring on their own hook. But, despite all this, I couldn't help a different feeling about the tangle with Dayton. Something seemed to tell me . . .

Of course, it's somewhat moss-eaten to say that Napoleon had his Waterloo but how do you like the expression, "Dahl had his dahlias"? Maybe it doesn't make much sense but it sure does apply to what happened . . . and what happened just bore out that peculiar premonition I had the first time Dahl . . . but here I go, getting ahead of my story again!

There was a crowd of ten thousand people out to see the game for the state championship, a good thousand of those folks from our home

town. The game was played on Thanksgiving Day, and cold? . . . Blue pores, but it was cold! The sod on the field had frozen till it felt just like a pavement when you fell on it. Our blood, though—it was hot! We were all steamed up over the greatest opportunity that had ever confronted Morton High. One more game under our belt and we would achieve the goal we had set out for. In the locker room we got together, waiting for the whistle, and slapped each other on the back and promised to give our teeth, if necessary, in order to beat Dayton. And the fellow we instinctively turned to, in that throbbing moment, was Dahl “Soft Heart” Strickler. We knew what he had done and we naturally hoped and prayed that he’d hand out larger and stiffer samples of the same thing to Dayton. Dahl smiled embarrassedly at all the fuss being made over him and, while he didn’t have anything to say, we could tell he was keyed up to offer five thousand apologies, if necessary, which meant that he was figuring on making a running track of the field.

We got a good break in luck at the start through winning the toss. This gave us the choice of goal and kicking or receiving. We

elected to receive and took the south end of the field since it sounded warmer than the north. Dahl was the focus point of all eyes as usual, and much more so because of the importance of this game. What would Morton's all-around athlete and famous fullback do against the mighty Dayton? From the kind of yells that the Dayton fans let loose, we could guess that special preparations had been made to put as many thorns in Dahl's bed as possible. There certainly weren't going to be any roses. . . . Dahlias? Well, that's a flower of another color. I haven't gotten to it yet.

"We're sorry, Soft Heart, we're sorry!" the Dayton crowd sang. But Dahl didn't seem to mind. He just trotted to his position as Dayton lined up for kick-off, unlimbering that wonderful smile of his.

Plunk! I'll never forget that opening kick-off if I live to like mushrooms. It went stinging on a line over my head, curving just enough to sail directly into Dahl's arms! I swung about and fell in with Pinkey Adams as part of the interference. We started up the field, pounding along over the hard ground, with the crowd making the air white from its lungs. I blocked out two Dayton fellows who tried to

get at the fastest man who'd ever worn mole-skins, and Pinkey Adams dropped another tackler with a thud that rattled every vertebra on his backbone. Pretty soon Dahl's interference was shot and he was out in the open, running like a deer. He never would have been stopped, either, if he hadn't slipped in making a dodging turn. As it was, he had carried the ball from his seven-yard line to Dayton's thirty-yard stripe, a tidy little jaunt of sixty-three yards! How sorry did Dayton feel for "Soft Heart" now?

"Touchdown!" yelled the Morton High fans.

It looked like our big chance. I could tell that the Dayton team was up in the air. If we could push across their goal line in the first few plays, the chances were we'd never be headed. Our rooters were going wild as we lined up for scrimmage.

"Give 'Soft Heart' the ball!" they cried.
"Give 'Soft Heart' the ball!"

But I fooled 'em. I slipped the ball to Pinkey. And he whizzed around end for five yards. Dayton was watching Dahl so closely that he was tackled and thrown. On the next play, though, I really slipped the pigskin to "Soft Heart" and the gentleman fullback tore

through left tackle like a fast express. He plowed seven yards, giving us a first down and putting the ball on Dayton's eighteen-yard line.

The Dayton captain called for time out. We'd given his team something to talk over. While they were getting their heads together, we gathered around Dahl and told him how much we thought he resembled the cat's ankle.

"A couple more times, Dahl, old boy, and you'll take us over!" I said. "They can't stop you!"

"You mean, they can't stop *us*," Dahl corrected, flashing that smile. You'd have had to hear him say it in order to get any thrill out of it. You know, that's one thing that's hard for me to understand . . . how a fellow that's so idolized can keep the size of his hatband the same. It seems to me I'd . . .

That's all right. I'm glad you called me. I'm all the time getting off the main road. Well, we lined up for play again and I gave the ball to Koch, our right half. He was stopped with a bare yard gain and Dayton fans sent some more white breath into the atmosphere. Then I fell back on our old reliable.

"Soft Heart" dug his toes into the hard earth and got set for a dash around left end

Dayton had a powerful hunch he was going to take the ball and when the pigskin was snapped back every eye was on Dahl. Gee! He hit two fellows who tried to tackle those driving legs and tossed them over on their backs! The third tackler got him, though, after Dahl had ripped off four yards.

Time out! One of the fellows who'd try to stop "Soft Heart" was stretched out flat. I don't know why, but the minute I saw this I let out a groan. And of course Dahl, picking himself up, elbowed his way in to where he could get a look. Apparently the Dayton bird was dead to the world. The referee, thinking the wind was knocked out of him, began to lift him up and down. But this didn't bring him around. The Dayton coach came running out from the side lines. He made a hasty examination, then stood up—grave-faced—and pushed the players back.

"Better get this man to a hospital right away," he said.

Oh, boy! It took the starch out of all of us to see 'em carrying the limp form of their left end off the field. And that was one time Dahl didn't have to say "I'm sorry." The fellow couldn't have heard it anyway. On top of that,

the other player who'd collided with Dahl was limping all over the place. Made it look as though Dahl was a regular killer. The crowd began yelling.

Fourteen yards from Dayton's goal, third down and six to make. I knew I'd better pass Dahl up for a time or two, so I called on Pinkey. He was good for two on a try around right. Last down and three to go! Now, I ask you—what would you have done? When yards were absolutely needed, you'd have called upon your most dependable ground gainer, wouldn't you? That's just what I did.

Dahl came in fast enough but it seemed to me . . . maybe it was my imagination . . . that he slowed up considerable as he hit the line. Despite that he went through between left tackle and guard for the required distance.

Honest, I thought our Morton High bunch would sprain their tonsils the way they whooped it up. A first down for us on Dayton's nine-yard line—the goal to make! We fellows on the team jerked Dahl to his feet and slapped him on the back and started shoving him back into position for the next play when a Dayton player ran up to the referee and called another time out.

Good night! There was a second player stretched out flat! The left tackle! And Dayton players were looking daggers at "Soft Heart," condemning him for rough stuff. Dahl's face was a study; he looked positively sick; he tried to protest, but the Dayton fellows wouldn't listen to him. Their coach came out on the field again and knelt down and tore off the left tackle's headgear. The fellow's head flopped over to one side . . . just like his neck was broken. I'm telling you—it was ghastly.

"To the hospital!" ordered the coach.

Then he took the referee aside and had a talk with him, evidently entering a protest against Dahl. Our rooters began booing him for this, because anyone could have seen that there'd been nothing intentional on Dahl's part.

"Never mind that, Dahl," I said, trying to console him. "It's the hard ground . . . they're only stunned . . . it wasn't your fault!"

But Dahl shook his head and rubbed a hand across his eyes as though he'd like to blot the whole scene out.

"Hold 'em, Dayton! Hold 'em! Hold 'em! Hold 'em!" yelled the home fans.

It was now or never for Dayton, all right. They got all set for us, a wild-eyed looking bunch, with the two substitutes that had been sent in, clawing the air and glaring at Dahl. I hoped I'd not have to use "Soft Heart" to make the goal after what had happened. I wanted to give him time to get over feeling bad. As I glanced back over my shoulder I could tell that his mind was more on the two fellows who'd been taken out than it was on the game. He kept looking toward the side lines where a crowd had gathered around the injured left tackle.

Well, we got to our last down and we'd only made three yards! I called time and got the team around me.

"See here, fellows," I said. "There's no sense in our going to pieces. If this ball goes over on downs we've probably lost our best chance of scoring. Dayton's hardly been scored on this season and the game isn't much more than five minutes old. We've got to put that ball across. Forget those accidents and open up a hole for Dahl. I'm send him through for a touch . . ."

"Not me!" begged Dahl.

The other fellows started. My blood felt sort

of prickly itself. Speaking of premonitions! Here she was! Not quite like I'd figured . . . but near enough to make things darned unpleasant. Maybe Coach Leonard would laugh at my complaining now!

"What's the matter?" I tried to bluff.

"Matter enough," answered our gentleman fullback. "I've already put two fellows out of the game. I . . ."

"You're going to carry that ball!" said I, fairly screaming it at him.

The whistle blew and we trotted back to our places. But our punch was gone. I knew it just as sure as I knew that Dahl, from now on might as well be a cigar store Indian. I gave him the ball, as I said I would, and Dayton stopped the great Strickler in his tracks for a two-yard loss. Great cheers from the assembled multitude who favored Dayton. Great groans from our thousand representatives. More groans as the Dayton fullback got off a fifty-yard punt that put his team out of danger. Cheers as Coach Leonard sent Cross in to take the place of "Soft Heart" and the finest sportsman anybody ever knew, went sobbing to the side lines. Oh, well . . . things like that are all in the game, you say. Sure! But there

were lots more things in this game yet than you could picture. Our spirit was shattered, of course, and Dayton steam-rolled over us for two touchdowns, missing one point after touchdown, however. The score at the end of the first half was Dayton, 13; Morton, 0.

It was along about the middle of the last quarter, when Dayton was pushing ahead toward a third touchdown, and we were resisting as stubbornly as we knew how . . . having enough pride left so's we didn't want to be trimmed too badly . . . along about the middle of the last quarter, as I said—and bing! Out from the side lines comes two familiar figures running. I took a good look at them and rubbed my eyes and took another look and then called time.

“Say, fellows!” I cried, “there’s something rotten in Denmark or else I’ve gone loco. Take a peep at those subs—that left end and left tackle. Aren’t they the same birds that Dahl was supposed to have sent to the hospital?”

The rest of the team looked; then we began a wigwagging to Coach Leonard which resulted in Cross being sent out and “Soft Heart” being sent back in.

“Permit me to introduce you to the victims

of your terrible line plunging," I said, with sweet vinegar in my voice.

Dahl, who had come onto the field under protest, turned and stared at the two Dayton fellows who returned his stare with unashamed grins. If the much press-agented gentleman fullback had really been using psychology in expressing sympathy for players who'd hit the dirt as a result of trying to stop him . . . here was one time when he had met his master . . . or masters. It was hard for us to tell which. It's my own private notion that the whole team framed up this little stunt, figuring to out-psychology the most feared man on our eleven. And now, when there was only seven more minutes to play and they had the game on thick ice, they just couldn't resist the temptation to let us know how neatly we'd been out-skulled!

Say—in all the time I'd known Dahl, this was the nearest I ever saw him come to getting his temper up. His face, as he looked at that chuckling bunch of cocky Daytonites, just seemed to freeze. He turned to me, as if in a daze, and said, "Gimme that ball!"

"We'll have to get it first, Dearie!" I retorted, jarring-like. "The other side has it!"

"Then *get* it!" he bellowed.

And we did. We took it over on downs on our fifteen-yard mark and the Dayton team lost some of their gloating expressions. But there really wasn't much for Dayton to worry about . . . even though "Soft Heart" had hardened. A two-touchdown lead and less than seven minutes to . . .

The first time Dahl carried the ball he cut the line like a carving knife and slashed through for nineteen yards! I took to feeding him the pigskin, alternating just enough to give him a deep breath now and then. Say, you never saw such an exhibition of ball-toting in your life! "Soft Heart" was a demon let loose. No apologies went now. The whole Dayton team could have stretched out on the ground and played dead and Dahl wouldn't have blinked an eye winker. The best psychology that Dayton could have used was never to have let our gentleman fullback know how he'd been hoodwinked. I guess they realized this when Dahl crashed over the goal line in four minutes after he'd reëntered the game. He kicked goal for the additional point, too, making the score—Dayton 13; Morton 7.

Three minutes to go! We kicked off to Dayton and downed the man with the ball on Day-

ton's seventeen-yard line. Dayton tried to stall. We spilled the first play from formation for a four-yard loss and they decided to punt as the best way to keep us from making things too uncomfortable in the short time left.

The punt was a beauty. Pinkey Adams was in line to catch it when he heard "Soft Heart" yell, "Let me have it!" Pinkey just got out of the way in time. Our gentleman fullback gathered the punt in on the dead run . . . something which you'll agree is plenty hard and hazardous. He was forty-five yards from the Dayton goal when he started. We formed all the interference for him that we could. But Dahl was mostly out on his own, through a scattered field. He straight armed two fellows who tried to tackle him, one of them the left end who'd so gallantly laid down his life in the first part of the game. Then Dahl cut halfway across the field to get around three tacklers he spotted rushing at him. He passed them at an angle which left them hopelessly out of his reach. I began to cry, "Allah! Allah!" to myself, because I knew that there'd never be time left for a play from scrimmage and if Dahl didn't go over the line the game would be

lost. As it was we stood a chance for a tie . . . a chance!

Did he make it? . . . Standing up! He dodged, turned and twisted through the last twenty yards so cleverly and so swiftly that all the Daytonites could grab was the ozone where he had been. Time was up as he planted the ball behind the goal posts for the touchdown which knotted the count at 13 all. And then, in the overtime allowed, our gentleman fullback, flashing that wonderful smile, also flashed his toe and the ball flashed over the goal post for the point which gave us our first state championship!

What has become of "Soft Heart" now? Well . . . he went into the aviation as soon as we entered the war. About a year and a half later he was over a different kind of a line . . . or lines . . . in France. And he saw one of his pal's planes shot down. The pal made a forced landing in enemy territory and "Soft Heart," looking down, saw him crawl from his plane, apparently uninjured. Dahl evidently thought he saw a chance of landing his own plane and picking his pal up. He was over open country and, though the air was hot with shells, he

circled around and nosed his plane. His pal on the ground, who'd resigned himself to capture, seeing what Dahl was going to do, wigwagged "Soft Heart" not to try it. But I guess from what you've heard of "Soft Heart," you'd know that he wasn't the kind to . . .

Yes . . . they got him . . . just as he zoomed over a group of trees, making for a level stretch of ground where he figured he could land and get away to a quick rise again. But there was a machine gun nest in the trees and they literally peppered him with bullets. The enemy had to give him credit for his nerve, though . . . and his sportsmanship. His pal, a fellow from Texas, wrote Dahl's mother after the war, and one of the lines in his letter has always stuck with me.

"When they picked him up," it said, "his face was set in that wonderful smile. The Lord doesn't make better fellows than my buddy, Mrs. Strickler."

"By the way, have you seen the memorial we erected for him at the school?"







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